

STUART GIBBS



THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE **spy school** SERIES

 CHARLIE THORNE
AND THE
ROYAL SOCIETY



A CHARLIE THORNE NOVEL

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**AND THE
ROYAL SOCIETY**

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*For my dear friends, the Matthews family
(Mike, Tara, Mira, and Maya)
and the Parker family
(Ken, Carol, Emily, Cole, and Josh)*

Newton was not the first of the age of reason.

He was the last of the magicians....

—JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

PROLOGUE

**Royal Society Headquarters
21 Crane Court
London, England
March 2, 1727**

Isaac Newton was terrified.

He had always known that, sooner or later, someone would become suspicious about what he had discovered, but he had never expected *this*.

An angry mob was storming toward the headquarters of the Royal Society, claiming he was in league with the devil. They carried muskets, clubs, and torches, whose orange light flickered ominously against the buildings of Crane Court.

From the second floor office that he used as president of the society, Newton watched them approach, peering anxiously through a narrow gap in the curtains, not daring to show his face. Most of the crowd looked to be uneducated rabble, which was to be expected, as little of London's population had any schooling at all. But scattered among them were also some priests and—most disturbingly—a few of the king's own beefeaters. Newton had always suspected that, should trouble arise, the king would protect him; after all, he had served England with honor for over thirty years. But now it appeared that would not be the case.

"Mr. Newton, sir. You must leave at once." A young scientist stood at the door of the office, his eyes darting nervously with fear.

Newton couldn't recall his name. In truth, he couldn't remember *most* of the names of the society's members. Throughout his life, he had rarely paid much attention to other people; his mind was too focused on his own work.

"I can't possibly leave," Newton argued. "Can't you hear that crowd? They'll tear me apart!"

The young scientist lowered his eyes in shame. "Not through the front doors, sir. Your coach awaits in the back."

Newton glanced out the window once again. The mob looked big and angry enough to break the doors down—and then who knew what they might do? Vandalize the building? Set fire to it? The Royal Society was home to countless important scientific works; Newton couldn't let them be destroyed.

An angry laborer threw an empty liquor bottle at the building. It shattered off the wall just below Newton's window. The other members of the mob cheered, then began to throw things as well: stones, garbage, empty bottles of their own.

Newton stepped back from the window and looked around his office sadly, realizing he would probably never return there again.

A heavy stone thumped off the window behind him, cracking the glass.

"Let us go," Newton said.

The young scientist quickly led the way through the second floor. They avoided the main staircase down to the grand entry foyer, where the mob was already pounding on the doors, and instead ducked into the servants' quarters. Even though Newton had been a member of the Royal Society for much of his life and president for the last eighteen years, he had never deigned to enter this area. As opposed to the impressive, formal rooms where the members of the society spent their time, the servant's quarters were cramped and utilitarian.

The young scientist moved as quickly as he could—and noted that, for a man in his eighties, Newton had little trouble keeping up. They hurried down the narrow, rickety servants' stairs, then shoved their way through the crowded kitchen, until they emerged into the mews behind the building.

Such streets could be found throughout London; they were the alleys that ran behind the respectable homes and businesses, where the horses and carriages were kept, often with rooms for the coachmen to sleep overhead. This mews was roughly paved with cobblestones and coated with a layer of horse dung, which reeked so badly that Newton recoiled at the stench. Normally, his carriage—like those of the other gentlemen—would be brought around to the front entrance, sparing him this experience. Newton's coachman had just finished rigging the carriage to the horses and now perched in the driver's seat atop it, ready to go.

"God be with you," the young scientist told Newton as he helped him into the coach.

Newton gave him no word of thanks. Instead, he took his seat, thumped the roof with his cane, and ordered, "Go!"

"Yah!" The coachman snapped the reins. The horses leapt forward so quickly that Newton was thrown against the back of the coach.

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction, he thought automatically.

The carriage thundered through the mews, heading for the arch that served as the entrance. Newton suddenly noticed the telltale dance of shadows on the walls of the buildings ahead. More torches were approaching.

"The mob is coming this way!" he shouted. "Do not let them impede us!"

The coachman urged the horses onward. Just as the carriage reached the arch, the rioters arrived. They were a splinter faction of the larger mob that had stormed the society's front doors, only a few dozen men and women, but still, they looked fearsome and wild in the torchlight. Some foolishly tried to grab the reins of the horses as they passed, only to be knocked aside.

However, one rioter managed to leap onto the running board and fling the carriage door open. He was so drunk that Newton could smell the liquor on his breath, and he carried a makeshift club. It was a wooden leg that had been wrenched off a chair, and the screws that had once held it in place now jutted from it dangerously like the spikes of a mace. "Heretic!" he roared, and would have clubbed Newton had the coachman not

turned the horse whip on him. He cried out in pain, lost his grip, and fell from the carriage, tumbling across the road.

But Newton was still not safe. Word of his escape had already spread through the mob, which turned away from the Royal Society and raced down Fleet Street after him, swarming three carriages that happened to be passing by. The rioters quickly commandeered them, throwing the coachmen to the road, and then took up the chase.

Whenever Newton had traveled through London before, his coach had proceeded slowly, due to heavy traffic and the wretched condition of the roads. Now he had no such luxury. Thankfully, it was late enough that the streets were mostly empty; the grocers and craftsmen whose stalls generally lined Fleet Street had packed up their wares and gone home hours ago. But there were still a few people about, and the carriage had to veer wildly to avoid them, all the while rattling so heavily over the cobblestones that Newton worried it might come apart at the seams.

They quickly left the mob behind, but the three stolen carriages still bore down on them.

Newton fearfully watched them approach, wondering how his secret had gotten out.

He had pushed things too far, that was to be sure. He should have retired from public life long before. He had made plans to do so, but then... he hadn't followed through. It was ironic, given how much he had avoided attention in his younger years, that he had been unwilling to relinquish it now. He was so used to being the smartest man in any room that he had presumed he could continue to keep his secret, even among the greatest scientific minds in the empire.

Obviously, someone hadn't merely figured out what he had done; they had also spread the word to the masses, sparking a riot. The question remained: Who?

The carriage raced through the city. Fleet Street was one of the most important thoroughfares in all of London, paralleling the Thames river through the sprawling metropolis until it arrived at the Tower of London, the seat of the English government. While most of London's streets were narrow, twisting alleys, Fleet Street was relatively straight and wide. This allowed Newton's carriage to move quickly, but unfortunately, there was also room for the pursuing carriages, which threatened to draw alongside him.

Despite the impending danger, Newton still couldn't help thinking about the mystery at hand. This had been a pattern throughout his life; once his mind was focused on something, everything else would fade into the background. Often, he would get so wrapped in his thoughts that he forgot to eat or sleep for days.

Now he wondered who had betrayed him. He had no shortage of enemies. A few decades earlier, he would have suspected a bitter scientific rival, like Robert Hooke or Gottfried Leibniz. Those men had passed away, but there were certainly still plenty of other scientists who bore grudges against him: men whose work he had discredited or mocked—or whom he had deemed unworthy of joining the Royal Society.

A pursuing carriage pulled close to Newton's as they hurtled past St. Paul's Cathedral. The great domed structure, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, was the tallest building in London by far, looming over the cramped, wooden structures around it like a giant among men.

Two men clung to the outside of the approaching carriage, ready to leap to Newton's from it, but Newton's coachman coaxed a burst of speed from his horses at the last moment. They surged ahead, cutting off the other carriage, which careened into the shops that lined Fleet Street. It glanced off the walls with such force that its front wheels tore loose. The vehicle toppled into the street, throwing Newton's potential attackers into the path of the other two carriages. The horses trampled them, then kept coming.

Newton barely noticed. He was too lost in thought, trying to deduce who was behind his betrayal. Perhaps it wasn't a scientist at all; he had angered scores of other people as well. As master of the Royal Mint for thirty years, he had pursued counterfeiters with a vengeance, sending many to the gallows. Some of their associates—or their families—must have still held a grudge. Had one of them been behind this?

Or perhaps he had angered one of his artisans at the mint. Or a member of the royal family. Or someone in Parliament. It seemed that someone was always getting upset at him for some reason or another....

Newton was suddenly aware that his coachman was shouting at him. Despite the dire circumstances, his mind had drifted. "What's that?"

"Which way should we go?" the coachman shouted again, more desperate this time.

Newton peered out the door of his carriage and took stock of his situation. Not far ahead, Fleet Street forked, one branch heading east toward the Tower of London, the other angling south to London Bridge.

Newton suddenly had an idea. "Go right!" he ordered, and the coachman tugged on the reins. The horses veered onto the southern road, taking the turn at such speed that the carriage threatened to topple, its two right wheels lifting off the ground. Newton threw himself against the high side to shift the weight. The wheels slammed back down onto the road, landing so hard their spokes splintered. Newton felt a shift in the carriage's movement and recognized, with concern, that his vehicle probably would not be able to withstand much more stress.

Ahead, London Bridge came into view. It was the only point to cross the Thames for miles in either direction, and thus, it was the center of the city. It had stretched between the banks in this spot since 1209, an edifice of stone so sturdy that it blocked much of the river's flow; the water on the western side was six feet higher than on the east, and it surged through the small gap in the center in a great, churning rush. A drawbridge spanned this section but had fallen into disrepair decades before. Wooden buildings lined both sides of the bridge, with shops below and living quarters above, leaving only a narrow gap through the middle, barely wide enough for two carriages to pass.

Both ends of the bridge were flanked by stone arches. For much of London's history, the heads of traitors and other criminals had been set on pikes atop them, including those of William Wallace, Thomas More, and Oliver Cromwell, but the practice had recently fallen out of favor. Newton's coach rumbled through the first arch and onto the bridge, closely followed by his pursuers.

Because the homes along the bridge were built of wood, shared common walls, and were heated by open flames, they regularly caught fire. A dozen of them close to the northern shore had recently burned down and were now being rebuilt, so the passage

across the bridge was even narrower than usual, as piles of wood and other construction supplies jutted into it.

Meanwhile, the damaged wheels of Newton's carriage were threatening to come apart at any moment. They were wobbling so badly that the carriage was dragging, straining the horses and allowing their pursuers to gain on them. Newton quickly envisioned the calculations in his mind and deduced that it would be mere seconds before his enemies were upon him.

He threw open the carriage door and clambered up to the driver's seat on the roof, startling the coachman. "Sir!" the man shouted. "What are you doing?"

"Follow me," Newton ordered, and then surprised the coachman yet again by leaping onto the back of one of the horses.

He wasn't nearly as spry as he had once been, so he almost lost his grip and fell beneath the horse's hooves, but he managed to hold on. His powdered wig tumbled from his head, revealing his short gray hair beneath.

The coachman knew better than to question the great Isaac Newton, so he leapt to the other horse, landing with far more grace.

Newton promptly kicked out the pin that connected the carriage to the horses. Behind them, the vehicle smashed into a pile of wooden beams and burst into pieces, blocking the road. His enemies quickly reined their horses to avoid crashing into it, but then could only look on helplessly as Newton rode away.

The commotion woke everyone on the street, and within seconds, shutters were being thrown open, and alarmed people were peering out their windows.

Newton rode onward alongside his coachman, their horses still dragging the rigging for the carriage, which sparked on the stone bridge. Newton pulled a knife from his belt and slashed through the leather straps, cutting his horse loose from it all, then galloped across the drawbridge and onto the south bank of the Thames. It wasn't until he had traveled through the entire city and reached the fields on the far side that he finally stopped his horse to give it time to rest—and allow himself one last look back at London.

Now that someone knew his secret, he could not return.

What he had discovered was incredible, with the power to change the world forever, but humanity wasn't ready for it yet. Although perhaps, some day in the distant future, it would be.

Newton gently spurred his horse and rode on into the night. He had a long way to go and many plans to put into motion.

PART ONE

THE LIBRARY

I can calculate the motion of heavenly bodies,
but not the madness of people.

—ISAAC NEWTON

ONE

Craobh Haven, Scotland Modern Day

The house hadn't been easy to find, but that was the point. The man who lived and worked there was wanted by Interpol, the CIA, and a dozen other law enforcement agencies. Only people who were desperate enough—and wealthy enough—to afford his services could go through all the trouble to track him down.

The house sat on a small peninsula that jutted into Loch Melfort on the ragged western shore of Scotland, surrounded by hundreds of acres of pasture. On a sunny summer day, it would probably have been beautiful, but now, a month into fall, it was gloomy and foreboding. Dark clouds hung low in the sky, and a cold rain was whipped sideways by the wind.

From the outside, the home looked much like every other old manor in the area, a once-grand place that had been battered by centuries of bad weather. Gray stone walls speckled with patches of moss. A sagging thatched roof. The whole structure tilted slightly to the side, as though the years of wind had slowly begun to shove it over.

Inside, however, it was surprisingly modern.

The original cramped interior had been gutted, and now there were spacious rooms decorated with fashionable furniture and expensive art. But the most contemporary part of all was a secret, a room that could only be accessed through an honest-to-goodness hidden door in a bookshelf. Pulling on a copy of Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* triggered the door to open, leading to a staircase that spiraled down into the earth, until it reached a workshop filled with so much state-of-the-art computing and printing equipment that it looked like the documents lab at CIA headquarters.

This was where the forger worked.

He was younger than Charlie Thorne had expected. Barely thirty, by her guess. She was upset at herself for being surprised by this.

Charlie knew, better than almost anyone, that people could do exceptional things at a very young age. After all, she was only thirteen but had already solved several ingenious mysteries that had confounded the rest of the world for decades.

Even though the room should have been chilly, given that it was buried in the dank earth of Scotland, the electronic equipment generated so much heat that it felt as though a fire was blazing. Charlie had shed the thick sweater and raincoat she had worn on her way there. The forger was wearing only a vintage T-shirt from a band he was too young to have ever seen in person, jeans with holes in them, and sandals.

He had a policy of not asking questions about his clients, but Charlie could tell that he was thinking about violating it. He kept glancing at her, wondering what someone her age was doing, seeking the services of someone like him.

Charlie looked and acted older than thirteen. Most people assumed she was closer to seventeen or eighteen, but even that was awfully young to be seeking forged passports.

To add to her mystique, Charlie hadn't said a single word since she'd arrived. Dante had been doing most of the talking.

Dante Garcia was rather young as well, considering that, until recently, he had been a respected CIA agent running a highly classified operation. He was only in his late twenties, with the same stocky, muscular wrestler's physique he'd had since college. He was Charlie's half brother, although for most of their lives, they had been estranged.

Milana Moon sat next to him. She was also in her late twenties—although she had never admitted her exact age to Charlie—and was lithe and athletic, with piercing dark eyes that signaled her intelligence. She had been an exceptional agent as well.

But then the CIA had turned on them. Charlie had information the Agency wanted, but Dante and Milana had refused to turn her over to them. So their status had been revoked, and they had been declared criminals. Which was why they were now in an underground bunker in Scotland, seeking the help of one of the best document forgers in the world.

Dante knew of other such people, but this man was the one they could get to most easily, and who was en route to where they were heading next.

"Our work requires that we travel a great deal," Dante was explaining. "Ideally by commercial airline..."

"You can't afford private jets?" the forger asked.

"There aren't that many private jet services in the world," Dante replied. "Our enemies are surely keeping tabs on all of them. At this point, we'd be less conspicuous traveling commercially."

The forger glanced at Charlie once again, obviously pondering what she was involved in. But he asked another question instead. "Are there any languages that all three of you speak besides English?"

"Spanish," Dante said. "And Mandarin Chinese."

Once again, the forger glanced at Charlie. Although this time, he was studying her carefully.

Charlie came from an extremely multiracial background. This, combined with her prodigious talent for learning languages, allowed her to blend in almost anywhere on earth.

"She could pass for Chinese," the forger noted. "Or at least partly Chinese." He shifted his gaze to Dante and Milana. "But not the two of you. Spain would work, though. Or Mexico."

"Let's do both," Dante said. "And ones from the United States as well."

The forger arched an eyebrow, as intrigued by this order as he was by Charlie's presence. "US passports are extremely difficult to fake."

"But they don't draw much attention," Dante stated. "And my sources say that you

can fabricate them perfectly.”

“I can. But they’re not cheap. And then all three of you want two more passports on top of those?”

“*Four* more, actually,” Dante corrected. “In case any of our identities get compromised.”

“That *really* won’t be cheap.” The forger wrote a price on a piece of paper, then slid it across his desk to Dante.

Dante picked it up. Milana looked at the price over his shoulder and was so startled, she spoke for the first time. “We’re only asking for fake passports here. Not a forgery of the *Mona Lisa*.”

“My passports are works of art,” the forger explained. “And there’s more to them than just the object itself. First, I need to fake multiple realistic entry stamps and visas from other countries; a blank passport is suspicious, while a well-used one is not. Then, I have to hack into the database of each country you want a passport from and create a realistic identity for all three of you, with a history of travel to the countries I’ve created the visas for. In addition, your case is special. I’ll need to create linked profiles to give the impression that you’re a family.” He pointed to Charlie. “Because someone her age traveling by herself internationally is going to garner attention otherwise. And finally, no offense, but I’m the only person in the British Isles who can do this kind of work to the specifications you need. I’m not sure how you got to this country in the first place, but I’m assuming you’ll need a passport to get back out again. Which means I have you over a barrel.” The forger grinned tauntingly.

Dante sighed, knowing the forger was right on all counts. They had arrived by sailboat, traversing the North Atlantic from the United States to Scotland. Dante was a capable seaman, so the journey had been quite pleasant, save for some nasty squalls once they reached the Scottish coast, but sailing was slow and therefore impractical. Dante was hoping that they wouldn’t have to travel far to find what they were seeking this time, but he still wanted to be prepared. Over the last few months, he had found that his plans rarely worked out for the best.

He handed the paper to Charlie, who gave the price a quick glance and then said, “That’s not a problem.”

At this, the forger could no longer control his curiosity. He broke his long tradition and asked a question about his clients. “She is the one who gets to make this decision?”

“Oh, she’s not just the money,” Dante said, giving Charlie a proud smile. “She’s also the brains of this operation.”

TWO

CIA Headquarters Langley, Virginia

I understand that you trained Agent Dante Garcia,” said Arthur Zell.

“Not exactly.” Agent Varsha Khatti did her best to avoid sounding condescending to the director of the CIA. She had never met Zell before, but his naivete about the world of espionage was no secret. Unlike the previous CIA director, Jamilla Carter, a respected analyst who had worked her way to the top, Zell was a political appointee. Carter had been forced out for reasons that were classified—except at the highest level—and Zell had hastily replaced her. That sort of thing was relatively common, but there were already rumors that Zell had made some serious missteps within days of his appointment, and that he might not even be at the Agency long enough to learn how things worked.

They were in the director’s spacious office on the top floor of the CIA headquarters building. Out the window, fall had arrived; the leaves of the thousands of trees on the campus had begun to turn from green to red, gold, and orange.

“I served as lead agent on Garcia’s first two operations at the Agency,” Agent Khatti continued. “He had already finished his training by that time.”

Zell waved this comment off dismissively, as though the distinction was unimportant. “And what was your impression of him?”

“He was an extremely promising young agent.” Khatti could have said much more, but she chose not to. Given Zell’s tone, she was quite sure this wasn’t going to be a positive conversation about Garcia.

Zell waited a few seconds, as though pausing for dramatic effect. Then he said, “Agent Garcia has been compromised.”

Khatti’s eyes widened.

“You’re surprised?” Zell asked.

“Yes. I wouldn’t have expected that from Dante.”

“He’s not the first respected agent who has turned.”

“True, but that doesn’t mean it’s not a shock. What happened?”

“What I’m about to tell you is highly classified. It can’t leave this room.”

“Of course.”

There was a safe built into the wall behind Zell’s desk. He pressed his thumb against a pad, and the door clicked open, revealing a stack of classified documents inside. “Under the direction of my predecessor, Director Carter, Garcia was running a top secret off-the-books operation. He was searching for an equation developed by Albert Einstein....”

“Pandora?” Khatti asked.

Zell turned back to her. “You’ve heard of it?”

“I’m sure everyone who works here has. It’s CIA lore. Einstein is said to have discovered an equation that would make it simple to harness all the energy inside the atom—and thus, to easily create nuclear weapons. But I always assumed it was just a silly rumor.”

“It’s not. And Garcia found it.”

Khatti sat forward in her chair. “How?”

“With *her*.” Zell removed a dossier from the safe and slid it across his desk.

Khatti opened it quickly.

The first thing she found was a surveillance photograph of Charlie Thorne. Then came the background information: her psychological profile, IQ tests, assessments of her various skills.

Khatti read all of it, growing more and more intrigued. “This girl’s intelligence is off the charts,” she said finally. “She’s like Einstein himself.”

“That was Garcia’s argument to Director Carter,” Zell replied. “The best way to find something hidden by Einstein would be to recruit someone as brilliant as he was. Garcia compiled all those reports. But he left out one very important piece of information: Charlie Thorne is his half sister.”

Khatti looked up in surprise. “How’d he manage to keep that a secret?”

“Their mutual father left Dante’s mother when she was three months pregnant and she didn’t keep his name. Dad got married again much later and had Charlie. So Dante is sixteen years older than Charlie and they don’t appear to have had much contact for most of their lives. But I suspect they were in cahoots for a while before he proposed recruiting her. Young Miss Thorne already had a history of criminal activity. She had hacked the system at the Lightning Corporation and made off with at least forty million dollars.”

Khatti’s surprise cranked up another notch. “That was her?”

“Yes. But Carter agreed to this risky venture anyhow. And as I’m sure you can guess, it was a disaster. Thorne found Pandora, but then she and Garcia, along with Agent Milana Moon, kept it to themselves. They double-crossed us.”

This final statement was a lie. While Charlie had balked at giving Pandora to the CIA for fear that the US government would weaponize it, it was Zell who had double-crossed Garcia and Moon. He had given his agents orders to kill them and kidnap Charlie—but they had failed.

Charlie had retaliated by leaking Zell’s orders to the director of national intelligence, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence—and the president of the United States. Zell had been chewed out by each one of them. The only reason he still had his job was politics. Firing the director of the CIA only days after his taking office would make the people who had nominated him for the job look bad. So he had been allowed to stay—with orders to clean up the mess he had made. That meant quashing the story and finding Garcia, Moon, and Thorne.

Khatti suspected that Zell wasn’t telling her the whole truth about what had occurred, but then, that was standard procedure at the CIA. And the information in the dossier was

damning enough. Garcia had schemed to bring a family member who was a criminal aboard an unsanctioned mission. And in the wrong hands, Pandora would be incredibly dangerous.

"I assume you want me to find them?" Khatti asked.

"Yes. You've worked with Garcia—and you've proven yourself at tracking down rogue agents before."

"Do you have any idea where they might be?"

"Even better. I believe I know where they're going." Zell removed another dossier from the safe. "It turns out, Einstein wasn't the only great scientist who discovered something he didn't think humanity was ready for. And he had done some research into who the others might be. While searching for Pandora, Miss Thorne cracked the code Einstein used to record all this, and our agents translated his notes."

Khatti opened the dossier to find the original coded documents, along with the translations. She had already been surprised several times during this meeting, but what she now read left her dumbfounded. According to Einstein, more than a dozen people from throughout history had hidden landmark scientific discoveries: Charles Darwin, Cleopatra, and many more. Einstein even hinted as to where he thought their discoveries might be located. It was like finding out that there were multiple important chapters that had been left out of human history books all at once.

Something occurred to Khatti. "Does Garcia have this list too?"

"Yes."

"How did he get it?"

Zell shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Thorne... er... hacked my CIA account."

"That's not possible."

"Turns out, it is. As noted, she's brilliant. But she's also cocky. And that's how we know where she's going next. Our techs managed to track where she did the hack from: the Azores." Once again, Zell was altering the truth to serve his purposes. Thorne had actually recovered Einstein's documents months before, then used them to track down the discoveries of Darwin and Cleopatra, outwitting the CIA—and numerous other enemies—both times. The hack she had done from the Azores was the one where she had stolen Zell's incriminating messages. But Zell didn't want Khatti to know any of that. He continued, "The last time Thorne was seen was in New York City. We have reason to believe she, Garcia, and Moon left the US by sailboat. And the Azores are a harbor in the North Atlantic on the way from America to Europe."

"Or Africa," Khatti suggested. "There are plenty of discoveries on this list they could be heading toward."

"True. But I had a team pull up satellite imagery of the harbor in the Azores on the day when Thorne performed her hack. There aren't that many small sailboats crossing the Atlantic at any time. Only three left in the day after the hack. One is headed for the Canary Islands, one went to another of the Azores... and the third has gone to a remote marina on the western coast of Scotland."

Khatti glanced back at the documents before her. One name immediately jumped out at her. "Isaac Newton."

“That’s our guess as well. Assemble a team. You’re heading to Cambridge.”

THREE

Several floors below Zell's office, two stories underground, another CIA agent was looking over Einstein's notes on Newton.

The agent was a young, low-level analyst, only a few years out of the academy, who didn't have the clearance level for such highly classified information. But it was almost impossible to keep secrets at an agency with thousands of spies.

The analyst's job was not glamorous. She spent most of her time staring at a computer screen in a dim, windowless office that she shared with another analyst, who was currently out for three months on maternity leave. The job was dull. The analyst craved excitement—and she needed money.

She was in debt from college loans, poor investments, and a really bad bet on the previous Super Bowl. Her situation wasn't awful. If she worked hard and cut down on expenses, she would be able to dig herself out in ten years, but that didn't sound like much fun at all.

So the analyst had found another way to make money.

A few weeks earlier, she had been assigned to do analysis on a mission that had gone sideways in Manhattan. Two rogue CIA agents, Dante Garcia and Milana Moon, had slipped back into the country, and somehow the Israeli Mossad had known about it before the CIA did. The CIA wanted to know what the Mossad knew, so the analyst had to root through thousands of transcripts of tapped phone calls. Somewhere along the line, she'd come across several mentions of Pandora, which piqued her interest. So she'd started digging and eventually, after a lot of clever deductive work, had tracked down electronic copies of the transcripts of Einstein's decoded notes that someone had foolishly forgotten to delete after transferring them.

Such information was worth a great deal of money.

Some of it would also be potentially dangerous in the wrong hands.

The analyst wasn't a bad person. She wasn't about to start World War III just to get out of debt.

So she selected what to sell with what she considered great caution. Einstein didn't reveal what any of the people on his list had found; it was likely that the great genius didn't know himself. But it seemed to the analyst that whatever Isaac Newton might have discovered hundreds of years before couldn't possibly be life-threatening. It would predate nuclear power or bioweapons or anything like that.

So the analyst set up an account on the dark web and offered the information to the highest bidder.

To her surprise, it was only fifteen minutes before she got a response—and the money

being offered was far more than she had imagined.

Still, she figured anyone willing to propose so much in an opening bid probably had a lot more cash to burn, so she wrote back, pretending that there were already other offers on the table.

Within two minutes, the buyer doubled their offer.

The analyst agreed to the deal. She set up an encrypted private bank account in the Cayman Islands. The buyer would deposit half the money, and the rest would be sent upon delivery of the information.

It took some time for the analyst to arrange everything so that she could transmit the information without anyone realizing what she had done, but it was finally all in place.

That morning, she had received confirmation from the bank that the buyer had sent the money—as well as a threat from the buyer that, if she tried anything sneaky, she would end up dead.

To the analyst's astonishment, the buyer knew her home address.

The analyst thought she had covered her digital tracks perfectly, but that was obviously not the case. She was dealing with someone who had the money and skills to find out whatever they needed.

And yet, despite the threat, she still hesitated before sending the information. While Zell met with Agent Khatti, the agent stared at her computer screen, weighing what she was about to do.

As of that moment, she had still not broken any laws. If she called off the deal, she could return the money to the anonymous buyer and not end up in any trouble—or so she hoped.

After fifteen minutes of dithering, she finally gave in and sent the information.

Simply put, the money was too hard to resist.

And from the analyst's point of view, leaking the information wasn't going to hurt anyone.

Which turned out to be completely and totally wrong.

FOUR

Trinity College Cambridge, England Two days later

There was only one sentence about Isaac Newton in Einstein's notes:

To find Newton's discovery, turn the tables in the Wren.

Charlie wasn't sure what "turn the tables" meant in this context, but the Wren was certainly the Wren Library at the University of Cambridge. Cambridge was the third oldest university on earth, founded in 1209. Newton had spent four decades of his life there—first as a student at Trinity College, and then as the Lucasian professor of mathematics. The library had been designed by Sir Christopher Wren, the same architect responsible for St. Paul's Cathedral, and was built during Newton's time at Trinity. Newton's personal copy of the *Principia Mathematica*, his landmark work that revealed the laws of motion and gravitation, was on display there—and many of Newton's notebooks and papers were housed in the library's archives as well.

Unfortunately, the Wren was no longer open to the public. For much of its existence it had been, but the increasing number of tourists had become a distraction to the students at Trinity. Anyone could apply for permission to do research at the library, but Charlie, Dante, and Milana didn't want to draw attention by doing that—or wait for their application to be accepted.

Besides, it wasn't that hard to sneak into the library. Or at least it wasn't hard for Charlie.

Since it was part of Cambridge, all university students were allowed access to the library, and Charlie looked like a student. A young student, perhaps, but there were plenty of those.

All Charlie had to do was get past security.

Cambridge was actually a collection of thirty-one separate colleges, each of which had its own campus and student body. Trinity was among the largest colleges, and, like the others, it was surrounded by walls and fences. The gates were staffed by security guards twenty-four hours a day.

But there was another way in.

The town of Cambridge got its name from the river Cam—and the single bridge that had provided a crossing point for it centuries earlier. Like most of the early colleges at Cambridge, Trinity had been built along the banks of the Cam, using it as both a water supply and a sewer. This dual use had ended for sanitary reasons in the 1800s—although

not before multiple outbreaks of disease—and now the Cam was merely a scenic waterway that wound through the college properties. It was a small, shallow river, only a few meters across and less than two meters deep. On sunny days, there was a brisk business renting boats to tourists along it. The boats, called punts, were similar to the gondolas of Venice, though much less fancy. They were propelled with a simple pole; a person would stand on the stern, jab the pole into the muddy bottom of the river, then push the boat forward. Most tourists hired a guide to steer the punt—and to share some Cambridge history as well—but Dante, Milana, and Charlie didn't want anyone else along with them, so they rented a punt for themselves.

It was only a short distance to Trinity along the Cam from the boat rental, but the punts were slow and difficult to control. It was a cloudy October day, five days after Charlie, Dante, and Milana had visited the forger—and well after the height of the summer tourist season, so there weren't many other boats out on the river. Only a smattering of families with teenagers who had come to consider Cambridge as a university.

"Are you sure you can handle this operation by yourself?" Milana asked Charlie.

"You've asked her that three times already," Dante reminded her.

"Because I'm concerned for her safety."

"Really?" Charlie asked teasingly. "Didn't you pull a gun on me once?"

Milana frowned at the memory. "That was back when I thought the CIA had our best interests in mind. And if the Agency happens to be here right now, it will be dangerous."

"I can recognize an agent when I see them." Dante pointed to the other tourists on the river. "And none of these people are agents."

"This isn't something to take lightly," Milana chided. "We have a history of things going wrong on these missions. And we're sending Charlie in alone...."

"No you're not." Charlie smiled, pleased by Milana's concern for her. When they had first met, Milana hadn't liked her much, but by now she was like an older sister. "I'll be in touch with you the entire time."

"But we won't be close," Milana said. "In case of trouble."

"Maybe there *won't* be trouble this time." Dante ducked his head as he maneuvered them under one of the many low bridges along the Cam.

"I don't think that's the best frame of mind," Milana argued. "We need to be prepared for anything."

"And we will be," Dante replied. "I'm just saying, maybe for once, this mission won't be so complicated. I mean, we're looking for something Isaac Newton hid. Newton didn't travel nearly as far as Einstein or Darwin—or even Cleopatra. In fact, he never left southern England. And he spent a significant portion of his life right here in Cambridge. So hopefully his discovery will be here, and we won't end up trekking through swamps or digging through ancient ruins or having anyone try to kill us this time."

Milana looked to Charlie, obviously wanting her opinion.

"I suppose that's possible," Charlie agreed. "Newton was really a homebody. He didn't have many friends. As far as we know, he never had a romantic relationship. He rarely socialized. And even though he served in the British Parliament for two years, the

only time he ever spoke was to ask someone to close a window. He really just kept to himself and worked.”

Dante grinned proudly at Milana. “See? Charlie agrees with me.”

“Well, not completely,” Charlie said.

Dante’s grin faded. “No?”

“There’s still a good chance this won’t be easy. Newton had one of the most formidable minds in history. I mean, consider that.” Charlie pointed to a wooden bridge they were approaching.

Dante and Milana both looked at the bridge. It was definitely unusual in its construction, but neither could say why.

“What’s so important about that?” Dante asked.

“Newton designed it,” Charlie replied. “It’s known as the Mathematical Bridge. And there are two fascinating things about it. First, it’s only built out of straight pieces of wood.”

Dante regarded the bridge once again with newfound respect. “Wow. That’s quite a feat of engineering.”

“And yet, it’s beautiful,” Milana added. “What’s the second fascinating thing?”

“Newton designed it in such a way so that it didn’t need a single nail to hold it together,” Charlie answered.

Dante poled them beneath the bridge, inspecting the bottom as they passed. “But there *are* nails in it.”

“Yes, because this isn’t the original bridge,” Charlie explained. “Many years ago, a group of engineering students took the bridge apart to figure out how Newton had built it. And then they couldn’t figure out how to put the bridge back together again. Mind you, these were modern engineering students with computers and the Internet at their disposal. But they couldn’t replicate Newton’s work.”

“Are you sure that’s not just Cambridge folklore?” Milana asked skeptically.

“Even if it is, the fact remains that Newton was no ordinary person,” Charlie insisted. “He revolutionized the study of optics, figured out what gravity was, determined how everything in the universe moves in space and time, and then had to develop an entire branch of math—calculus—to explain it all. So if he wanted to hide a discovery, locating it might not be easy.”

“It seems like Einstein found it,” Dante pointed out.

“Einstein was a super genius,” Charlie reminded him.

“So are *you*,” Dante stated. “You cracked Einstein’s code. You can figure this out too.”

“Don’t be so sure,” Charlie warned. “And there’s a good chance Einstein *didn’t* find this. He’s just telling us where to start looking.”

“I have faith in you,” Dante insisted.

Charlie sighed. She knew her half brother’s confidence should have been reassuring, but worry still nagged at her. On the one hand, she was daunted by the challenge of finding what Newton had hidden—and on the other, she was worried about what might happen if she *did* find it. Einstein’s discovery had been an equation powerful enough to threaten the safety of all humanity; finding it had made Charlie a fugitive. The only

physical copy of the equation had been destroyed in a fire, but Charlie had memorized it first; now lots of people were willing to do whatever was necessary to get her to reveal it. The CIA had turned on Dante and Milana when they refused to turn her over, and other governments were also after her. If Newton had discovered something equally as powerful and dangerous as Einstein, then Charlie feared she could end up in even greater jeopardy. And Dante and Milana would too.

The only reason Charlie continued looking for these discoveries was that unscrupulous people were looking for them as well. She knew the CIA was, and since secrets almost always leaked out, it was likely that others were on the hunt. The best way to protect what Newton had discovered was to get to it first.

It was a heavy burden for someone of her age to bear, no matter how brilliant she was. It made her thankful that Dante and Milana were now on her side. Both of them had given up a great deal for her. Their promising careers had been ruined, and they were now fugitives. They were taking a big risk to be there with her, because they knew it was the right thing to do.

“We’re here,” Dante announced.

He brought the punt around a bend in the river Cam, and the Wren Library came into view.

It was a blocky stone building the size of a large high school gymnasium set fifty yards back from the riverbank across a wide, open lawn. Unlike the other buildings of Trinity, it was not particularly attractive—at least from this side. At the time of its construction, the Cam had been so polluted with human waste that Christopher Wren had assumed no one would ever view the building from the river. All the architectural adornments were on the opposite face.

Times had changed. The Cam was now quite picturesque, and even on a chilly fall day, the Trinity grounds were lovely. On the side of the river across from the library, there was another great lawn, flanked with tall trees sporting a riot of autumn colors. Charlie suspected that, if the sun had been out, Trinity students would have been gathered in large numbers on the lawns; even now, despite the cloudy weather, a few were sprawled on the grass, studying.

None of them were paying any attention to Charlie; tourists on punts were so common, they must have seemed as eternal as the trees.

Still, Charlie had to move quickly, so as to not draw attention to herself.

The banks of the river were a few feet high, but there was nothing else to prevent Charlie from accessing Trinity College from the water. The rest of the property was surrounded by walls and fences, but the riverbanks were unguarded. It appeared that no one felt it was worth ruining the view of the river to protect this area against trespassers.

Milana gave Charlie a boost, and she easily hopped onto the opposite bank of the river from the Wren. It took less than two seconds, and none of the students noticed. Milana sat back down in the punt, and Dante continued poling along, as though they were normal tourists.

A private bridge only for Trinity students arched above the Cam. Charlie casually ambled over it; in her street clothes, she looked like any other student at Cambridge.

The Wren Library loomed ahead of her.

Maybe, this time, it will be easy, she thought hopefully.

Although, as she headed across the lawn toward the library, she couldn't shake the disturbing feeling that trouble lay ahead.

FIVE

There were no books on the ground floor of the Wren Library.

Before its banks had been shored up, the river Cam had flooded regularly. Both Wren and Newton, who had championed the construction of the library, had feared the books being damaged by the water, so most of the building's ground floor was simply an open cloister, with stone columns interspersed throughout to support the weight of the structure above.

Thus, the entrance to the library itself was an unassuming pair of wooden doors, set into a stone wall. Charlie felt as though she was entering a storage room, rather than one of the greatest repositories of knowledge in history.

From the entrance, a staircase led up to a mezzanine, where a second pair of wooden doors opened into the main room of the library itself.

Once Charlie passed through them, what she saw took her breath away.

To begin with, the room was beautiful. In contrast to the building's drab exterior, the interior was warm and inviting. The room was also extremely tall, with a soaring ceiling and thirty-foot walls. Handcrafted bookshelves lined the lower third of the walls, while above them were arched windows fifteen feet high and six feet across. The windows had been a great innovation of Wren's; this was the first library to have any, and thus make use of natural light—although it was rumored that Wren had set them so high off the floor because he feared that, if the students could see out of them, they would be distracted from their studies. Still, they worked. Even on this gray day, light spilled through them, creating a beguiling glow throughout the room.

The books themselves were beautiful too. Thousands of old, leather-bound volumes lined the shelves, with gilt-embossed titles on their spines. Their rich scent was intoxicating to Charlie.

She found the library's history breathtaking as well. To begin with, Isaac Newton, one of the greatest scientists who had ever lived, had designed it with Christopher Wren, one of history's most distinguished architects. And in the centuries after them, thousands of other brilliant people had studied in this room. A glass case by the door held notable works by just a few of Trinity's distinguished alumni: Newton's copy of *Principia Mathematica*, an autographed collection of poems by John Milton, the original drafts of A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*, and the handwritten notebooks of Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. Robert Oppenheimer.

The librarian, an old man in a formal Trinity College blazer, looked up from the reference desk and gave Charlie a slightly suspicious stare. "Are you looking for something?"

"I'm just in awe," Charlie replied earnestly. "This place is amazing."

The librarian considered the room, and then smiled, as though he'd forgotten how incredible the space was and was now pleased to remember it. "Yes, I suppose it is."

"I'm going to explore a bit," Charlie told him.

"Of course," the librarian said. "Take all the time you need."

Charlie headed into the center of the library, taking everything in. She put in her earbuds and acted as though she was snapping pictures with her phone, when she was actually starting a video call with Dante. He answered quickly, as he'd been waiting for her.

He was now seated in the punt with Milana, having pulled to the edge of the river in the shade of a large weeping willow not far from the Wren, both of them ready to race to the rescue should Charlie need it. "Did you have any trouble getting in?" Dante asked.

"None at all," Charlie replied quietly.

"I can barely hear you," Dante said. "Can you speak up?"

"No. I'm in a library, dummy." The thousands of books muffled noise in the Wren, but there were several students studying, and Charlie didn't want to disturb them.

"Right," Dante said sheepishly. "Okay, just keep filming. We're here if you need us."

Charlie tucked her phone into the breast pocket of her shirt so that the camera poked out, then continued through the room, looking for any place Newton might have hidden his discovery.

Unfortunately, there were *thousands* of places. Hundreds of thousands, really. Each book could have concealed something inside, and many of them looked as though they hadn't been touched in centuries.

No, Charlie thought. Newton probably wouldn't have stashed his discovery in a book here. The library was finished only shortly before his death, and it had taken decades to acquire the collection. In Newton's time, the library would have been almost empty. So it made more sense that Newton would have used one of the more permanent structures in the building as a hiding place.

Einstein's clue had said "turn the tables."

The bookshelves did not merely run along the walls but jutted out every twenty feet, creating wide alcoves. Inside each of these was a large, square wooden reading table surrounded by heavy wooden benches. Charlie had researched the library. She knew the furnishings were original and designed by Christopher Wren, although some people thought Newton might have also had a hand in their construction.

In the center of each desk was a rotating book stand, a decapitated four-sided pyramid of wood that swiveled on a post. Geometrically, the shape was known as a frustum. Each was large and sturdy enough to support four heavy books, one on each side.

"That looks like a way to turn the tables," Milana observed, having seen them on the video.

"Yes," Charlie agreed, "but there's more than a dozen tables in here. Which one is the right one?"

"Are you talking to me?" asked a voice behind her.

Charlie wheeled around, surprised, to find a college student only two feet away. He

was Asian, with an endearing British accent. He was just under five and a half feet tall, and wore a Cambridge crew T-shirt and shorts that showed off his athletic physique.

Charlie's immediate thought was that he was quite handsome.

"Er... no." She backed away, feeling her face flush. She was upset at letting herself be overheard and flustered by her attraction. "I was just... um... talking to myself."

The student grinned, amused. "Talking to yourself about the tables?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

The first response that popped into Charlie's head was "I like tables," but she held her tongue, fearing it would make her sound foolish—and she didn't want to sound foolish in front of this boy. Then a second idea came to her, one that she liked much better. "I'm doing a mystery hunt."

The boy's eyes lit up with excitement, as Charlie had expected might happen.

A mystery hunt was a competition, often organized at universities, where a series of complex puzzles was created for students to solve. Charlie had participated in a few when she was at the University of Colorado and found them great fun. (They had been a good opportunity for her to make friends because just about everyone on campus, knowing how brilliant she was, had wanted to be on her team. And of course, they had won handily, thanks to Charlie.)

"I didn't hear about any mystery hunt today," the boy said. "Who's running it?"

"A bunch of engineering grad students at King's College. It's really tough. Want to help?"

"Of course! What are you looking for?"

"No, Charlie," Dante said over her earbuds. "This is a bad idea."

Charlie couldn't reply without the boy noticing—and she didn't want to anyhow. She figured she could use the help, but there was another reason as well: Charlie was lonely.

She had always been a social person, but when Dante and Milana had entered her life nearly a year earlier, Charlie had abruptly been cut off from her friends. Except for one brief reconnection with her friend Eva in Athens—which had ended in a near disaster—Charlie had barely even talked to anyone close to her age. Besides Dante and Milana, almost all the people she had interacted with had been enemies. She knew there was no way that she had any chance of becoming friends with the boy in the library, but still, it was nice to make any kind of social connection at all.

"I'm not sure what I'm looking for," Charlie admitted. "All I have is a clue to turn the tables here. So I think something might be hidden in one of the book stands."

The boy frowned. "How could someone do that?"

"That's what we need to figure out."

"Charlie," Dante said again. "Bad. Idea."

Charlie ignored him once more.

"This way," the boy said, and started across the library. Charlie followed him.

Most of the tables had students working at them, but two were unoccupied. Each still had books piled atop it, as though someone had left in the midst of research but intended to come back. The boy led her to the one with the fewest books. "I think whoever was

working here went to lunch. I'm Kenji, by the way."

"Don't give him your real name," Dante warned.

"I'm Charlie," Charlie said, and she heard Dante groan in response.

"Nice to meet you," Kenji said with a smile. He sat at the table to inspect it closer.

Charlie did too. The tabletop itself was rather thin, set upon four ornate legs. Despite being several hundred years old, the book stand swiveled easily. It had obviously been well built and well cared for. Charlie noted that the construction of it was quite simple but sturdy, with the sides nailed onto the frustum's frame.

"There are twenty tables in this room," Kenji reported. "Do you have *any* other clues that could help us narrow down which it might be?"

Charlie hesitated before answering, weighing how much to give away. But she realized that, if she wanted Kenji to help her, she couldn't keep everything to herself. "It might have something to do with Isaac Newton."

Kenji immediately sprang to his feet, as though struck by an inspiration. "I think I know which one it might be!" He quickly headed back through the library.

Charlie hurried after him, wondering what he was thinking.

Images of Newton himself appeared twice in the library. One was a marble bust, situated at the end of one of the bookshelves that jutted into the room, while the other was far more dramatic. In the wall opposite the entrance was a large stained glass window in which Newton was being presented to King George III by Fame, the muse of the college, while Francis Bacon and a few cherubs looked on. Charlie had read that this window had been covered with a black drape for over a hundred years for fear that it was a distraction for the students, but she wondered if maybe the real reason it had been covered was because it wasn't very attractive. The whole thing seemed rather pompous and silly to her.

However, she knew that both the window and the bust had been added to the library long after Newton's death, so Newton wouldn't have been able to reference them when leaving a clue. And Kenji didn't seem to have any interest in them. Instead, he brought her to a table in the center of the room and pointed dramatically to the bookshelf above it. "Newton!" he declared proudly.

At first, Charlie was confused by what Kenji meant. Along the top of the bookshelf was an intricate wooden carving. All the bookshelves in the library were decorated with them. Charlie hadn't had the time to examine them closely yet but had observed that they were mostly flowers, plants, and animals, with the occasional family crest, probably representing Trinity College benefactors. She had expected that the carving above this table might feature Newton, or perhaps his family crest, but it was merely some vines winding around some fruit.

But then she realized what fruit it was. An apple.

Charlie beamed with excitement.

She had heard the legend of Newton and the apple tree as a young child. But unlike many historical legends, this one wasn't too far from the truth. Newton himself had told the story. When he had been a student at Cambridge, the black plague had struck, forcing the closure of the university. (It had also killed up to 20 percent of London's population.)

Newton had been sitting beneath the tree when one of its apples fell onto his head, sparking the *aha!* moment that led him to develop the law of gravity. The original tree still existed, while a cutting from it had been used to grow another apple tree in Cambridge; it was located by the front gates of Trinity College, not too far from where Charlie stood.

“Have these carvings always been in the library?” Charlie asked Kenji.

“Yeah. They were done by an artist named Grinling Gibbons.”

Charlie giggled, despite herself. “You’re making that up.”

Kenji held up an open palm. “I swear it’s true. He was really well known in his time. Did carvings for the king and queen of England too.”

Charlie glanced at the other carvings around the alcove where the table sat. There were two more apples among them. “Are there any other apples in this library?”

“Not that I’ve noticed, and believe me, I’ve spent plenty of time here.”

“Shhh!” a student at the table hissed. She was seated by herself, surrounded by history books, one of which was propped on the book stand.

“Sorry,” Charlie whispered, although she feared she was going to have to disturb the student even more. She suspected that Kenji was right: The apples were a subtle reference to indicate which table Einstein meant. Charlie needed to take a closer look at this one.

But before she could, a bigger problem presented itself.

Dante spoke over the phone. “Charlie, we’ve got company. Get out of there now.”

SIX

Milana had noticed the men first.

There were two of them, wearing groundskeepers' uniforms. Both carried rakes, but they weren't using them. Instead, they were merely walking around the grounds of Trinity, casing the property.

Milana was still in the punt on the south bank of the Cam with Dante, hidden by the draping branches of the willow tree. She nudged him, then pointed to the men. "Think we should be concerned about them?"

Dante considered them. They were extremely large and muscular, although that didn't seem inappropriate for groundskeepers. One was black, and one was white.

They stayed close to the library, rather than coming out onto the lawn, which was covered with autumn leaves and in need of a good raking.

Dante had brought a pair of binoculars, which were always important to have on a stakeout. From the shade of the tree, he took a closer look at the men.

Both had wired earpieces, which was unusual for groundskeepers. And they appeared to be listening intently to whatever was being said over them.

As Dante watched, both men moved toward the doors of the library.

Which was when he decided to abort the mission.

In the library, Charlie took her phone from her pocket, acting like she had just received a call. "I have to take this," she said to Kenji. "It's my dad."

"We're not supposed to use phones in here," Kenji warned, nodding toward the librarian Charlie had met when she first arrived.

But the man had turned his attention to a book and didn't seem to be watching them. Charlie stepped away from all the other students and pretended to answer her phone, speaking in a low whisper. "What's up?"

"We've got two suspicious characters at the entrance of the library," Dante reported.

"Are they coming in?"

"Not yet."

"Okay, then I still have time."

"You don't. We're compromised. Get out of there."

Charlie glanced back toward the table, feeling frustrated. She had a gut sense that she was close, that Kenji was right about the apples, and that she was only a few feet away from Newton's discovery. To turn back now seemed foolish to her.

Kenji noticed her and gave a friendly wave.

"I can do this," Charlie said.

"I'm ordering you to leave," Dante insisted. "This is serious. And I don't like you

bringing in an outsider to help....”

“The more time you talk, the more time we’re wasting,” Charlie told him. “Let me know if the bad guys enter the library.”

“If they do, it’ll be too late!”

“Then maybe *you* ought to take care of them. Bye, Dad.” Charlie pretended to hang up and then returned to Kenji, rolling her eyes. “Parents.”

“My dad’s a pain too,” Kenji said.

“We need to take a closer look at that table,” Charlie told him.

“Shh!” the girl seated there warned once again.

“I know how to get rid of her,” Kenji whispered, then approached the girl.

She gave him a challenging stare. “I’m trying to study.”

Kenji calmly fished a crisp fifty-pound note out of his wallet and laid it on the table. “Want to use another table?”

The girl instantly snatched the bill from his hands and gathered her books. “It’s all yours.”

Kenji grinned at Charlie proudly. “Ta-da!”

She looked at him curiously. “Can you afford that?”

“I’m not just brilliant. I’m also rich.” Kenji spoke in a mocking way that brought a smile to Charlie’s face.

She realized that, for the first time in a long while, she was having fun.

And it bothered her that it was probably going to end as soon as she solved the problem and found Newton’s discovery. Once that happened, she’d have to vanish from Kenji’s life, just as she had from the lives of any other friend she’d ever had.

Kenji had already taken a seat at the table and was examining the book stand, spinning it slowly so that he could look at it from all sides.

The book stand made a different noise than the one Charlie had rotated before. The first one had turned smoothly, while this one made a ratcheting noise, as though there were gears moving inside it, which Charlie took as a sign they had the right table.

And then she realized something else. “This stand looks different from the others.”

“Yeah. I got that sense too. But how?”

Charlie frowned in annoyance. “I don’t know.”

They continued turning the stand, examining it closely. And then Charlie had a sudden burst of insight. “There aren’t any nails in it! The other one was nailed together. But this one isn’t!” she whispered excitedly.

Kenji looked at her, impressed. “Like the Mathematician’s Bridge!”

“Exactly.”

“Ooh. Check out the big brain on Charlie.”

Charlie felt herself flushing again, embarrassed by his flattery. But frustration immediately set in. She wasn’t sure what to do next.

Without nails, the wooden book rest was put together like a three-dimensional jigsaw. The pieces all had prongs and divots that interlocked. The construction was exquisite. Everything fit together so perfectly, it had stayed intact since Newton’s time.

Charlie hated to admit that she didn’t know something, but now she had to. “How do

we open it?"

"I'm pretty good with these sorts of puzzles," Kenji said in a way that was reassuring, rather than cocky. "I've solved a good number of them. Usually, there's a small piece that serves as a pin, which holds it all together." He continued rotating the stand, examining it closely.

"Charlie," Dante said over the phone. "The people of concern are heading for the library entrance. You need to abort the mission."

The concern in his voice was serious. Charlie realized the situation was dire—and yet, she knew she couldn't leave now. If she did, Kenji would find Newton's discovery without her. So she stayed where she was, which also meant that she couldn't respond to Dante.

"Charlie, did you hear me?" Dante asked. Now he sounded like he was running. "Abort!"

There was a distant creak from the entry foyer as the great oak doors were opened.

Kenji gave a gasp of surprise.

He had found a dark brown knot in one of the faces of the book stand. At first glance, it looked like it was part of a plank of wood that had been used to build the panel, but when Charlie looked closer, she realized the knot was a separate piece. "Is that the pin?"

"Only one way to find out." Kenji pressed the knot with his thumb. It held firm at first, but then it gave, sliding backward into the book stand.

"Charlie!" Dante yelled. He was breathing heavily now. Charlie figured he and Milana had leapt from the punt onto the lawn and were running toward the library to help her.

Charlie could also hear heavy footsteps coming up the stairs.

A series of clicks came from inside the table, as though some ancient machinery had started up. The book stand began to rotate. It wasn't very loud, but in the otherwise quiet library, it might as well have been a cannon blast. All the other students looked up from their studying to see what the noise was. So did the librarian.

"What's all that racket?" he asked.

Charlie didn't answer. She was staring at the book stand in awe. So was Kenji.

Before their eyes, the stand was disassembling. The intricately fitted pieces came apart, and the stand opened, like a flower blooming. The panels spread out like petals, revealing an eighteen-inch-long brass tube with glass at each end that had been concealed inside.

A telescope.

At the far end of the library, two imposing, muscular men stormed into the room.

Charlie snatched the telescope, intending to flee.

But before she could, Kenji grabbed her and slammed her backward into the closest bookshelf.

The look on his face was no longer friendly. Instead, Charlie saw only cold determination. And he was much stronger than she had expected.

He wasn't a student, she realized. He was an enemy. And she had led him right to Newton's discovery.

In one fluid movement, Kenji wrenched the telescope from Charlie's hand and threw her to the floor.

He raised the scope triumphantly, displaying it to the thugs who had entered. “I got it!” he announced.

And then he ran for the door.

SEVEN

Charlie was stunned by Kenji's betrayal—and by his strength. He had caught her completely by surprise.

But like so many of the other bad people she had encountered, he had also underestimated her. He had simply tossed her aside, as though that was enough to stop her.

Charlie was tougher than she looked, and she had spent much of the last few months on a sailboat, learning self-defense from two ex-CIA agents. The moment Kenji turned his back on her, she sprang to her feet and went on the attack.

It wasn't hard to find the perfect weapon. The library was full of them. A good, thick book was as powerful and heavy as a club. Charlie snatched a thousand-page tome off the closest shelf and ran after Kenji.

He heard her coming and spun around to confront her, probably expecting that he would be able to easily knock her aside once more.

Which was underestimating her again. The moment Kenji turned back, Charlie whacked him in the face with the book.

Kenji reeled backward. Charlie threw the book down onto his foot hard enough to make him yelp, then snatched the telescope back and bolted in the other direction.

Kenji recovered quickly and came after her. Behind him, the two big men split up. The white man doubled back through the entrance, while the black man continued toward Charlie, moving with surprising speed for someone so big.

Charlie dashed through the library, passing bookshelves, marble busts, and tables full of startled students. "I've got Newton's discovery, but I'm on the run!" she told Dante over her phone. "Two of the guys are after me, but one's coming your way!"

It was a testament to Christopher Wren's foresight that, even centuries earlier, he had considered the safety of the students when designing the library. There was an emergency exit on the far side, so that in case of a fire, no one would be trapped inside—and the precious books could be removed as well. It was concealed in a wooden panel so as to not upset the symmetry of the library, down and to the left of the stained glass window. In a strange way, it looked as though Newton was pointing to the exit in case there was trouble.

A few modern safety touches had been added to the door. There was now a clearly marked exit sign above it, along with a notice that it was alarmed and only for emergencies.

Charlie figured this qualified.

She shoved through the door, instantly setting off the alarm.

She found herself in a narrow stone stairwell that led up as well as down. Charlie went up.

She feared there could be more enemies that Dante hadn't noticed, and she was in no mood to be caught by surprise again, this time by someone lying in wait at the base of the stairs. She also hoped that maybe she'd get lucky and Kenji wouldn't realize she'd gone up instead of down.

So once she had gone one landing up, she paused and threw her back against the wall, hiding herself from view and holding her breath to avoid making a sound. Below her, she heard the two men barge through the fire door. Then Kenji said, "You go down. I'll go up."

Charlie cursed silently and started running again, hoping she wasn't headed for a dead end.

When the big white guy raced out of the library, Dante was waiting for him. He was standing by the doorway, armed with the only weapon he could find: the pole from his punt. He swung it like a bat, catching the big man across the chest.

The pole was thick and heavy, and Dante was in excellent shape. The blow would have taken out most people. But the big man was barely shaken. The blow knocked him back a step but didn't knock him down. It was like hitting a rhinoceros.

And then, to make matters worse, the big man quickly turned the tables.

He grabbed the pole and ripped it from Dante's hands. So now *he* had a weapon.

Dante scrambled away as the man swung the pole at him. It barely missed his head and smashed into one of the stone pillars in the cloister so hard that it snapped in two.

Which actually made things worse. Because the man no longer had a pole. He had a spear. The half of the long stick remaining in his hands now had a jagged, pointy tip.

The big man charged like a medieval knight, looking to run Dante through.

Charlie burst out the door at the top of the stairwell and found herself on the roof of the library.

The roof was peaked in the center to allow water to run off, with a thick stone railing circling the edge. The western side of the building overlooked the lawns and the river Cam, while the eastern side faced the rest of Trinity College. In the center of the eastern side were four large human statues representing Divinity, Law, Medicine, and Mathematics. The library was the tallest building around, so Charlie had a good view of the surrounding city.

It was immediately evident that this spot was occasionally visited by students—although it probably wasn't allowed. A large collection of empty beer bottles lay along the base of the stone railing, while some prankster had spray-painted the rear ends of all the statues bright pink.

The alarm was echoing all over campus.

There were no buildings to the west of the library, only a five-story drop to the ground. But on the other side, the Wren connected to neighboring buildings at both ends, forming the western edge of a large, rectangular courtyard. Charlie ran to the railing and looked down.

The roof of the adjoining building was twenty feet below her and it sloped steeply.

Behind Charlie, the stairwell door banged open, and Kenji emerged.

Charlie leapt over the railing.

She dropped to the roof below but didn't nail the landing. She lost her balance on the slope, tumbled down it, and slammed into the railing. She got to her feet, shaken and wobbly, only to see Kenji come flying off the roof of the Wren.

It appeared that he hadn't even hesitated. He had simply run from the stairwell door and leapt. He landed perfectly atop the peak of the roof with grace and agility that reminded Charlie of a cat.

She couldn't help but think that she was being pursued by a modern-day ninja.

The ground below her was too far to jump. So she ran again, racing along the stone railing, following the roof.

Kenji came after her.

Dante dodged the big man's charge. The tip of the makeshift spear sliced the air beside him. The big man reacted quickly. He pivoted and came at Dante again.

Dante dodged once more, though not as fast this time. The jagged wood of the spear grazed his arm.

A few students were out in the courtyard to the east of the cloister, but all of them were ignoring the alarm, presuming that it was probably false. They continued reading their books or talking to their friends, and the alarm was drowning out the sounds of the fight. So no one noticed Dante battling for his life.

He dodged the spear tip again, but the big man now caught him by surprise once more. Instead of trying to stab Dante, he simply clubbed him, knocking him to the ground. Then he stood over Dante, raised the spear above his head, and prepared to impale him with it.

But before he could, Milana cracked him on the head.

She had recovered the other end of the busted pole, taken a running start, and then clobbered the man with all her might.

The big man staggered, dropping his own weapon, and then Milana hit him again.

The man sank to the ground and passed out.

Far across the cloister, the other thug was coming.

Dante and Milana ran in the opposite direction, into the courtyard.

"Where's Charlie?" Milana asked.

"Where else?" Dante pointed upward, to where Charlie was racing across the rooftops. "In danger."

Charlie had been training hard over the past few weeks, working out with Dante and Milana, building her stamina and getting stronger. She was in excellent shape, but Kenji was still nimbler and faster.

Plus, Charlie's ankle was aching from her poorly landed jump, and running along the edge of the pitched roof was making it worse, sending shocks of pain through her body.

Kenji was gaining on her.

The building Charlie was running across connected directly with the one next to it,

forming the northeast corner of the courtyard. Most of the buildings at Trinity were attached to one another, which created the feeling of the entire campus being a singular unit—and also allowed students to get from one place to another without going outside in nasty weather, which was common at Cambridge.

The building ahead was one of several dormitories at the school. It was the same height as the building Charlie was on and constructed in the same style, although its peaked roof ran from north to south, rather than east to west. Charlie ran directly onto it, then up the slope to the peak of the roof.

From there, she had a view into the Great Court of Cambridge, an enormous open quadrangle that was said to be the largest in all of England.

Kenji was only a few steps behind her.

Charlie slid down the slope of the other side of the roof. There was no railing to stop her this time. Instead, there was a peaked gable below which a stone balcony jutted out. Charlie sailed over the lip of the roof, dropped to the balcony—wincing as a bolt of pain shot through her ankle—and then grabbed the knob of the glass door there.

It was locked.

Kenji dropped onto the balcony behind her.

Backed against the locked door, Charlie was trapped.

Kenji came at her.

Charlie dropped to the floor and curled her body around the telescope. It wasn't a very dignified way to protect it, but she doubted that she'd be able to fend off Kenji for long if she tried anything else. "Help!" she yelled.

Kenji knelt beside her. He couldn't get to the telescope, so he roughly grabbed the back of her neck. "Give me the telescope. Or I'll hurt you."

"Help!" Charlie yelled again.

"I warned you," Kenji said, then jabbed his thumb into a pressure point on her neck.

Charlie cried out in pain.

"Give me the telescope," Kenji repeated.

"No," Charlie said through gritted teeth. She kept her body curled around the telescope—although she didn't think she'd be able to hold out much longer.

The glass door suddenly burst open. College students piled out onto the balcony.

The room on the other side of the door was a dining hall. Charlie had seen the students through the glass and figured that a young female student crying for help wouldn't go unaided.

Even more students had come to her rescue than she'd expected. There were a dozen, boys and girls alike, all ready to protect her. Inside the dining hall, other students were blowing emergency whistles, alerting security.

A strapping boy with a Cambridge wrestling sweatshirt yanked Kenji away from Charlie. "Get off her!" he ordered.

Kenji gave the kid a hard punch in the nose, startling him, then broke free of his grasp. Before anyone else could grab him, he sprang over the balcony railing. He dropped two stories into the Great Court, landed softly on the grass, and sprinted away.

A few people tried to stop him, but Kenji knocked them aside and disappeared

through an archway on the far side of the court, shoving through the exit gate there and vanishing from view.

A concerned college girl leaned over Charlie. "Are you all right? Did he hurt you?"

"Yes," Charlie said. Her body was still radiating pain. "Pretty badly."

"Can you stand?"

"I think so." Charlie got to her feet but felt shaky enough to let the students support her.

"What were you doing up on the roof?" a boy asked.

"Trying to get away from that guy," Charlie replied.

The boy started to press for more information, but the girl cut him off before he could. "Cool it. She just got attacked!" She returned her attention to Charlie. "What do you need?"

Charlie realized that, in her haste to get away from Kenji, she hadn't had a chance to look at the telescope she was carrying.

But she had other priorities at the moment.

"I could use a quiet place to call my family," she said.

"Of course," said the other girl. "Come with me."

EIGHT

Lammas Land Park Cambridge, England

You were defeated by a girl,” said Yoshi Yataro. He spoke so softly, he could barely be heard. And yet, the disgust in his voice was impossible to miss.

“No,” Kenji insisted. “I would have won, but many people came to her aid.”

“Then she outwitted you,” Yoshi stated. “Which is even worse.”

Kenji lowered his eyes in shame.

They were seated on a bench in the shade of a great oak tree, overlooking a duck pond in a park on the outskirts of Cambridge’s downtown.

Kenji had come directly there from Trinity College, running the whole way.

Yoshi was well into his eighties, but he was in exceptionally good shape, and strangers often presumed him to be twenty or even thirty years younger than he was. His skin was nearly free of wrinkles, save for a few faint lines around his eyes, and his thick head of hair was jet black, without the slightest hint of gray. This was the result of a fanatical obsession with his health. Yoshi never consumed junk food or drank anything other than water; he claimed to have never even tasted chocolate. He walked ten miles a day and got at least eight hours of sleep every night. He rarely even carried a cellular phone, because he was concerned about the radiation they emitted—which was somewhat ironic, given that Yoshi had made a tremendous amount of money in the cellular phone industry. Most of the time, he had an assistant close by who carried a phone for him, although that was not the case at the moment; Yoshi wanted his conversation with Kenji to be private.

As usual, Yoshi was impeccably dressed. His suit had been custom tailored in Tokyo. His watch had cost more than many people’s cars. He had homes all over the world, including a mansion in London. He could have stayed there and let others oversee this operation, but it was so important to him that he had insisted on coming himself. He had not wanted to wait any longer than necessary to see Newton’s discovery once his team recovered it.

But they had come up empty-handed.

The other two men, Block and Dryden, hadn’t even managed to get to the rendezvous point yet. Dryden had been knocked out and was still recovering; Block was helping him work his way out of Cambridge while trying to avoid campus security or the police.

Yoshi had also come to England with a doctor, a nurse, a physical trainer, a masseuse, and a chauffeur. He never traveled anywhere without them. The doctor and the chauffeur were currently in his limousine, which was idling at the far end of the park, to give him

privacy. Everyone else was back in his London house.

Yoshi and Kenji were speaking in Japanese. It was their native tongue, but also, they didn't want anyone to eavesdrop on their conversation. Not that this was an issue; on this gray day, no one else was in the park. It looked as though it was about to rain.

"Who was this girl?" Yoshi asked. "A college student?"

Kenji considered that, then shook his head. "I don't think so. I think she was younger."

Yoshi turned away from the duck pond to give Kenji an even more disappointed stare. "Younger? Like a child?"

"No, but... a teenager. Not an ordinary teenager, though."

"Why do you say that?"

"She was extremely smart. And somehow, she had the same clue that I did, about turning the tables in the library. In fact, she knew *more* than I did. That this discovery has something to do with Isaac Newton..."

Yoshi stiffened. His eyes clouded with anger, but he remained silent.

Kenji gathered his nerve, aware Yoshi would probably not appreciate what he was going to say next. "Perhaps, if you had given me that information, I would have found the telescope before she showed up."

Kenji had only arrived at the library fifteen minutes before Charlie. He had jumped a fence to access the Trinity College campus but then had the same amount of ease moving about as Charlie, since he was the same age as a college student. Meanwhile, Block and Dryden, being older, had been forced to steal groundskeepers' uniforms and IDs.

Kenji had hoped he would be able to find what Yoshi wanted quickly, but in truth, he had been overwhelmed in the library. Then Charlie had come along. Kenji had been surprised to encounter someone else looking for something hidden in the library, but quickly realized he could take advantage of her. Only, the girl had proven tougher, faster, and more clever than he'd expected. And she hadn't been alone. Her team had neutralized Block and Dryden. So now they had the discovery that Yoshi wanted, while Kenji was left with nothing.

If that wasn't bad enough, Yoshi now seemed disturbed by what Kenji had just said. "Telescope?" he asked. "What telescope?"

"That's what was hidden in the table in the library. Is that not what you were looking for?"

Yoshi thought for a while. His confusion turned into annoyance. "It appears there is more to all of this than I suspected."

Kenji gathered his nerve once again. "I could probably be more help if you let me know what you are looking for..."

"You have not proven that you deserve my trust," Yoshi snapped. The calm facade he had presented to Kenji cracked, revealing the simmering anger he had been trying to hide. "You do not need to know the specifics. Only that what I seek is powerful and important enough to change the future of all humankind. I have spent years of my life—and a considerable amount of my fortune—looking for it, and now, thanks to your ineptitude, someone else has bested us in the hunt for it."

Kenji lowered his eyes once more. "I'm sorry, Grandfather. It won't happen again."

"It had better not." Yoshi glared at Kenji without remorse. He had no issue with making his grandson feel terrible; he *wanted* the boy to feel terrible, to know how badly he had failed.

Although, as angry as Yoshi was at Kenji, he was even angrier about the girl. The idea that she had shown up just as he was on the verge of finding Newton's discovery and then taken it from him was infuriating.

Who was she? Where had she come from? And how had she known of Newton's discovery, when it had taken him decades of research to learn of its existence?

One thing was for sure: Despite her youth, she was a formidable opponent. She had solved Newton's clue, then defeated Kenji and escaped.

But now that she had made herself known, Yoshi Yataro would find her. He had his methods, and he had plenty of money. He could find anyone he wanted.

And next time, the girl would not get away.

NINE

Great St. Mary's Church Cambridge, England

The roof of the bell tower at Great St. Mary's was the highest point in Cambridge. The church itself had been the original home of Cambridge University, after scholars had defected from Oxford in 1209, although the bell tower hadn't been finished until 1608. At 114 feet tall, it offered a panoramic view of the entire town.

And yet, most people were either unaware that visitors were allowed to visit the roof—or unwilling to climb the 123 steps to get there. Dante, Milana, and Charlie had the space to themselves.

In addition to it being private, the bell tower had an extra layer of security. The old staircase was so narrow that the church staff made announcements when someone was starting up, so that the people at the top wouldn't head down. Therefore, Charlie, Dante, and Milana would be alerted if anyone was coming and could prepare for trouble. As any student of medieval history knew, the person upstairs always had the advantage in a fight. The staircase inside the bell tower had even been built to spiral clockwise, the same as in any castle turret. That allowed the person who was above to hold their weapon in their right hand, while the person below would have to use their left.

Earlier in the day, Dante, Milana, and Charlie had chosen the bell tower as their burrow: the safe place to reunite if anything went wrong. And now that things had certainly gone wrong, they were gathered here, inspecting what Charlie had found in the library.

"A telescope?" Dante asked, upon first seeing it. "That's Newton's big discovery?"

"Newton might be remembered for a lot of other things," Charlie said, "but back in his time, the telescope was what first brought him attention. Before Newton, all telescopes had used lenses to focus light, but that was a flawed system, because the lenses acted like prisms and separated the colors in the light. Newton had been experimenting with prisms and figured out that white light actually contained all the colors of the spectrum, which was huge news in the 1600s. So he realized what the lenses were doing and figured out how to use a mirror to focus the light instead. Then he built the whole thing himself. It worked so well that when he showed it to members of the Royal Society, they immediately offered him membership—and then took the telescope to the king of England."

"That's all very impressive," Dante said, "but this is still just a telescope. That's not the sort of thing that you'd have to hide from humanity, is it?"

“No,” Charlie admitted. “I’m guessing that this is just the first clue to finding Newton’s real discovery.”

Dante groaned and slumped against the stone railing of the roof. “Of course. None of these brainiacs can ever make this easy, can they?”

“If Newton had truly found something powerful or dangerous, then he *should* have done his best to make it hard to find,” Charlie argued. “You said it yourself before, when we were looking for Einstein’s equation: This is the seventeenth-century version of a firewall in a computer program. Without it, some random person could have stumbled across that hiding place in the library and found Newton’s discovery.”

“Some random person almost *did* stumble across this,” Dante said. “Thanks to your recklessness.”

Charlie narrowed her eyes at him. “I wasn’t being reckless. I needed help. And the guy wasn’t random. He was obviously looking for Newton’s discovery too.”

“Which you practically handed right to him!” Dante exclaimed. “I told you not to engage him! But you disobeyed a direct order!”

“This isn’t the army,” Charlie said. “I don’t take orders. You came to me because you needed *my* help finding these things. If you don’t like how I do it, then you’re welcome to try to find all these things yourself.”

Dante started to argue further, but before he could, Milana spoke. “You both have valid points,” she said. “Dante, Charlie had no reason to suspect that that kid would be an enemy agent. And Charlie, Dante is speaking out of concern for you. He gave you a warning and you disobeyed it, which jeopardized the entire mission and put your life in danger.”

Charlie and Dante both nodded, realizing that Milana was right.

And yet, Charlie was still convinced she had made the correct decision. She didn’t want to admit it to the others, but she wasn’t sure that she would have ever found the telescope without Kenji’s help. At the very least, it certainly would have taken her much longer to notice the carved wooden apples that signaled which was the correct table, or to determine how to disassemble the book stand. And the longer it took, the more likely it was that someone like the librarian or a student would have noticed her and grown suspicious. While it was true that Kenji had conned her and forced her to make a dangerous escape, the fact remained that she now had Newton’s clue, while Kenji did not.

Which meant that Charlie’s decision, while risky, had paid off.

But rather than pointing this out—which she knew would provoke an argument—she held her tongue and turned her attention to the object she had worked so hard to get.

The telescope was an expertly crafted tube of brass, which Newton had etched his name into. At the wider end was a glass lens, which was crude and thick by modern standards, but which would have been state of the art in the 1600s. From what Charlie knew, Newton had ground his lenses himself, as well as devised the means for shaping the mirror that was hidden inside. At the opposite end of the telescope tube was yet another brilliant invention of Newton’s: an eyepiece mounted to the side. This revolutionary innovation allowed the user to peer through the telescope without having their view

blocked by the mirror. Virtually every telescope constructed since used the same design.

“What we really need to figure out,” Milana said, “is who were those people at the library?”

“You knocked one of them out,” Charlie said. “Why didn’t you check him for ID?”

“We were coming to save *you*,” Dante snapped, obviously still annoyed at her. “Did you learn anything from the bad guy while you were helping him find that telescope?”

Milana gave him a sharp look. “That attitude isn’t helpful.”

“He said his name was Kenji,” Charlie reported.

“That could easily have been a lie,” Dante said.

Charlie shrugged. “Maybe not. I gave him *my* name.”

“Which I warned you not to do. Because it was—”

Milana interrupted him before he could go any further. “Did you notice anything of interest about Kenji? Anything that would give us a clue as to who he was?”

“He wasn’t much older than me,” Charlie reported. “College-age at most. And he was smart. *Really* smart. But I don’t think whoever he was working for had told him everything. I think he knew the clue about turning the tables, but it was news to him this had anything to do with Newton.”

Milana and Dante shared a look of concern. “You’re *sure* he knew the clue about turning the tables?” Dante asked. “You didn’t give him that information yourself?”

“I think he knew it,” Charlie insisted. “And we know the CIA had that clue too. Do you think he could have been an agent?”

“The CIA doesn’t recruit people that young,” Milana said.

“You recruited *me*,” Charlie reminded her. “So maybe someone else recruited him?”

“It’s unlikely,” Dante said.

Milana nodded in agreement. “Which means the CIA has a leak.” She looked back to Charlie. “Anything else you can tell us about this kid?”

“He was in incredible shape. I’ve never seen anyone move like this guy outside of an action movie.” Charlie aimed Newton’s telescope at the horizon and peered through the eyepiece.

“The guy I fought was well trained too,” Dante noted. “That kind of muscle doesn’t come cheap. Which indicates that whoever we’re up against is well funded.”

“Think they’re with another intelligence agency?” Charlie couldn’t see anything through the telescope. Only darkness. She frowned and peered through the lens at the other end.

“They don’t usually recruit college-aged kids either,” Milana said. “I’m guessing it’s a private concern.”

“Me too,” Dante agreed.

“What’s wrong with the telescope?” Milana asked. She’d been watching Charlie.

“It’s not working. It’s like the mirror that should reflect the image through the eyepiece is missing. Or”—Charlie brightened at a sudden thought—“maybe something’s blocking the light.” She tried to unscrew the metal flange that held the main lens in place.

It was stuck fast after centuries in the same place. Charlie couldn’t budge it. She gave up after a few tries and handed it to Dante. “Here.”

“Asking a man to open something for you?” Milana taunted. “Not very feminist.”

“But practical,” Charlie countered. “Of all of us, he’s the strongest...”

“Thanks,” Dante said.

“... smelling,” Charlie finished, with a grin.

Dante gave it a shot. His muscles bulged under his shirt as he strained. Then, with a screech of metal, the flange came loose. It popped off in his hand, along with the lens, revealing the interior of the telescope.

A piece of paper was rolled up inside it.

Charlie quickly pulled it out and unfurled it.

She had researched Newton enough lately to immediately recognize his writing. It wasn’t merely his looping script. It was also his habit of filling up every inch of a piece of paper. Back in Newton’s time, paper had often been a luxury. Some of Newton’s notebooks were so crammed with ideas that his words and diagrams overlapped.

In addition, much of the writing was in code. That was typical for Newton as well.



Dante groaned, looking over Charlie’s shoulder. “For Pete’s sake. Another code to crack?”

“Don’t be such a grouch,” Milana told him. “I think this is just a Vigenère cipher.”

Charlie instantly brightened. “I think you’re right!”

The Vigenère cipher had been very popular in Newton’s time and was one of the first codes that many people learned in cryptography. It was a relatively simple system that relied upon a large grid of letters.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
A	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
B	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A
C	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B
D	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C
E	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D
F	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E
G	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F
H	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
I	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
J	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
K	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
L	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
M	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
N	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
O	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
P	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
Q	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
R	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
S	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
T	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
U	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
V	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
W	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
X	X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W
Y	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
Z	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y

With the knowledge of a code word, a passage could easily be encrypted—and

decrypted. There was just one problem:

“We can only decode this if we know Newton’s code word,” Dante groused. “Otherwise, it’s useless.”

“Newton has already given us the code word,” Charlie said knowingly.

“Where?” Dante asked.

“Right here.” Charlie pointed to the riddle scrawled along the margin. “Newton wasn’t exactly Mr. Comedy. I haven’t seen a riddle—or any kind of joke at all—anywhere else in his documents. So the answer to it is probably the key to the cipher.”

Milana dutifully read the riddle. “What is it that you can fit twenty in a tankard and yet one will fill a library?” She turned to Charlie. “You know what the answer is?”

“Of course,” Charlie replied. “I’ve known this riddle since I was five. It’s a candle.”

“A candle?” Dante asked, confused.

Charlie gave him a disappointed look. “Yes. Even though candles are small, they can make a lot of light; enough to fill a library.”

“That’s not a very good riddle,” Dante observed.

“I guess that’s why Newton is famous for his science and not his comedy,” Charlie replied. “‘Candle’ is definitely the right answer. It works as the key.”

Milana gave her a look of surprise. “You’ve already translated the entire thing in your head?”

“No. Just the first words so far. But it works.”

In Charlie’s mind, she had imagined the grid she needed to translate the letters and worked out the beginning of the translation.



“It starts out saying ‘To find my great discovery...,’” she explained.

Dante’s bad mood began to fade. “And what does the rest say?”

“Give me a moment,” Charlie told him. “This isn’t so easy to do without a pencil and paper.”

A bolt of lightning suddenly split the sky, followed a second later by a great boom of thunder. While Charlie, Dante, and Milana had been distracted by Newton’s code, a storm had quickly rolled in.

A warning announcement came over the speaker system on the roof. “Inclement weather is approaching. It is now dangerous to be on the roof due to the threat of lightning. All guests should evacuate the bell tower immediately.”

Charlie, Dante, and Milana dutifully headed for the exit, ducking into the stairwell just as fat drops of rain began to spatter on the roof.

Milana led the way down while Charlie continued translating the code in her mind. They cautiously descended the spiral staircase, on the alert for any enemies who might be coming up—as well as watching their footing on the ancient, worn stone steps.

On their way, they passed both the door to the belfry, through which they could see the nine great church bells—and then the door to the lower room where the ropes that controlled the bells dangled. The end of each rope had been tied in a noose, so that the room looked eerily like a large hangman’s gallows. It gave Charlie the willies.

“Are you done yet?” Dante asked impatiently.

“No. But I’m close,” Charlie reported.

“What do you have so far?”

“It says, ‘To find my great discovery, set the yellow prism in the proper place on the dome at St. Paul’s at noon on the summer solstice.’ That makes sense. Newton did a lot of work with prisms and how to refract light through them. And St. Paul’s cathedral was designed by Christopher Wren, just like the library here. So if we find the right spot, I suppose the light will refract in some way and point to the hiding place of Newton’s discovery.”

“How are we supposed to find the right spot?” Milana asked. “St. Paul’s is massive.”

“Newton already showed us that, too. It’s right here.” Charlie pointed to the drawing of a wall on Newton’s clue.

“The summer solstice was four months ago,” Dante reminded her. “Do we have to wait until the next one to set that prism?”

“Not necessarily. We just need to calculate where the sun would be at noon on the solstice and then shine a strong light through the prism.”

Milana smiled, impressed. “Okay. So where is this prism?”

“I’m still working on that part. Give me a moment.” Charlie worked out the final words of the code as they passed through the small doorway at the bottom of the bell tower and emerged back into the main cathedral. “Uh-oh,” she said.

“What’s wrong?” Dante asked, concerned.

“We’ve got a problem,” Charlie announced. “A big one.”

TEN

Duxford Airfield Near Cambridge, England

The Duxford Airfield had been built at the tail end of World War I. In the race for superiority in the air, Great Britain, assisted by America, had hurriedly carved numerous runways into the relatively flat countryside around Cambridge. Duxford was completed a little too late for World War I, but sadly, it was needed again only a short time later for World War II. Today, it is home to a branch of the British Imperial War Museum, which houses hundreds of vintage planes in its hangars, along with a large assortment of tanks and other military craft.

It also remains a working airstrip. For the most part, it is used by crop dusters, small-plane enthusiasts, and the volunteer mechanics who keep the museum's fleet of aircraft in working order.

But on occasion, MI6 and the CIA use it as well.

It is the perfect place to covertly enter the country. Thanks to the museum, there is already a government presence at the airstrip, which allows British Intelligence to operate a small field office there without raising any eyebrows. Furthermore, it is far from the crowds and bustle of London's two main airports, Heathrow and Gatwick. The landscape around Duxford hasn't changed much in the decades since the wars. The airstrip is still surrounded by farmland and sees little traffic.

It is also located close to Cambridge, which was why the CIA landed there.

Agent Varsha Khatti arrived with three subordinate agents on a private jet, which taxied to a hangar that was reserved for diplomatic use. They hadn't even parked before Khatti's phone began ringing.

Her phone listed the incoming call as a spam alert, but Khatti didn't get spam calls, because her CIA phone number was classified. The spam alert meant Arthur Zell was calling, most likely from an encrypted line.

The moment Khatti answered, Zell said, "You're too late."

"Why is that?"

"You haven't seen the news?"

"I've been flying."

"There was a robbery at the Wren Library at Cambridge an hour ago."

"You're sure it was her?" Khatti took care not to say Charlie's name on the call. All calls were recorded.

"No, but who else could it be?" Zell sounded panicked. "According to witnesses, a

young coed stole some ancient artifact out of a hiding place no one had known about for three hundred years. Sounds like the work of our friend."

"Relax," Khatti said. "This is a good thing."

"How could this possibly be good?"

"Because now we know she's here. Before, it was only a presumption that she might be after Newton's discovery. And if this only happened an hour ago, then we also know she's close by. Which means the other people of interest are most likely close by as well."

A few moments passed while Zell digested that. When he spoke again, he sounded a bit calmer, although he was still on edge. "Still, they're in the wind. And they have Newton's discovery...."

"Not necessarily. From what I understand, on previous missions, locating these items hasn't exactly been one-stop shopping. And now that they've made a high-profile attack on the library, they're probably not going to chance leaving the country. Instead, they're going to try to lay low. I'll check in with my contacts, keep my ear to the ground, and see if I can get a lead on them."

"That's good thinking," said Zell.

I know, thought Khatti. "Then I'll proceed. If you could have all information on the Cambridge incident sent to me, that'd be a help."

"I'll have my office take care of it right away." Zell hung up.

The jet pulled into the hangar. As it did, rain started falling outside. Hard.

Agent Khatti smiled, pleased by how things were going. Dante Garcia was close—and he had no idea that she'd been tasked with finding him. Khatti knew all of his contacts in England. After all, she had given them to him. If he made a move, Khatti would know about it.

And then she'd catch him and Charlie Thorne.

ELEVEN

Great St. Mary's Church Cambridge

The prism is hidden among the jewels on St. Edward's Crown," Charlie said.

Standing in the cathedral of Great St. Mary's, Dante looked at her blankly. "I don't know what that is. Who was St. Edward?"

"Edward the Confessor," Charlie explained. "The crown was made for King Charles the Second back in 1661. It was used to coronate all the kings of England for the next few centuries."

"Why would Newton hide something in a crown?" Dante asked, exasperated.

"It's pretty brilliant, when you think about it," Charlie replied. "What better place to hide a prism than among a bunch of jewels? After all, cut jewels are usually prisms. There are several hundred on the crown, so Newton's would blend right in. Plus, it's a great way to ensure that the prism wouldn't get lost. As long as England is around, that crown is going to be protected."

"But how could he have even arranged to hide it there?" Dante demanded.

Charlie answered, "The crown jewels have always been kept at the Tower of London, which was also the seat of the government for most of England's history. It was a castle, and armory, a prison—and the location of the Royal Mint."

Milana's eyes suddenly lit up with understanding. "Newton was master of the mint."

"For thirty years," Charlie added. "And as master, he actually lived at the Tower of London. The job was just supposed to be a cushy retirement gig for Newton, with a big salary and free housing. Kind of a reward for all the great scientific work that he'd done. No one was expecting him to do much. But he really threw himself into the job. He oversaw reminting almost every coin in England, and he went after counterfeiters in a big way. He would even go on undercover missions to collect evidence against them."

Dante asked, "And as master of the mint, Newton had access to the crown jewels?"

"I suppose," Charlie said. "At the very least, he was living in the same complex where they were stored. So it seems he was able to hide a prism among them."

Lightning flashed outside the stained glass windows. Then came a crack of thunder so loud it made the church vibrate. Rain pounded on the roof. Outside, it was almost as dark as night.

Dante's mood had grown dark as well. He slouched in one of the ancient wooden church pews, glowering.

Charlie sat beside him. "What's wrong?"

Dante looked at her, incredulous. “*Everything*. I thought this mission was going to be a cakewalk. You’d go into the library, find whatever Newton had hidden there, and we’d be on our way. But there’s someone else after this thing, all we found was a clue to the next location—and now we have to get a prism off the crown jewels, which might be the most highly protected items in all of England.”

“Okay, that’s a setback,” Charlie admitted. “But maybe we can figure something out.”

“I’ve been to the tower,” Dante said. “The jewels are kept inside alarmed glass cases which are then housed inside one of the most secure vaults ever built. The walls must be two feet thick. Then there are thousands of security cameras. And if all that wasn’t daunting enough, the whole place is protected by the Yeoman Warders, who aren’t your usual minimum-wage security staff. They’re an elite branch of the British Army with the specific job of protecting the crown jewels. There’s no way we can get past all of that.”

“Yes there is.”

Dante blinked, thrown by the comment. He had expected that Charlie would make such a rash statement. But to his astonishment, it was Milana who had spoken.

She slid into the pew beside him, beaming with excitement. “There’s one thing about the vault for the crown jewels that makes it very different from other vaults: They allow tourists inside. We can use that to our advantage.”

Dante gaped at her. “You’re honestly suggesting that we pull off a heist at the Tower of London?”

“It can be done,” Milana insisted.

“How?” Charlie asked eagerly.

“For starters,” Milana began, “we’re going to need some heavy-duty explosives. And a T-shirt cannon.”

PART TWO

THE HEIST

To every action there is always
opposed an equal reaction.

—ISAAC NEWTON

TWELVE

London, England

The Tower of London is actually a complex of buildings, none of which is a tower. It stands on the north bank of the river Thames in the heart of London. Construction first began on it nearly a thousand years ago at the direction of William the Conqueror, a Frenchman of Viking descent who had defeated the English at the Battle of Hastings. William's Norman Conquest gave rise to the line of kings and queens who have sat on the throne of England ever since—although William himself spoke French. He never mastered English, and French remained the language spoken in English royal courts for the next few centuries.

William knew how to make a statement: He ordered the construction of a castle that would strike awe in the hearts of all who saw it—and serve as a symbol of his power to the people he had just conquered. The original building was a stone fortress, over one hundred feet long on each side and ninety feet tall. It had three stories, each with soaring ceilings, and was accessed by a flight of wooden steps that could be removed to thwart attackers. At the time of its construction, nothing like it had ever been built in England before; it was the largest, most impressive building most Londoners had ever seen.

This building, which eventually became known as the White Tower, served as a home to royalty—and a dungeon to their enemies. Over the next centuries, the kings of England oversaw a great expansion of its fortifications. Two concentric rings of buildings were constructed around the White Tower, and then a moat was dredged around those, effectively creating a man-made island for the palace complex. For centuries, most people arrived and departed the tower by boat, docking at a wharf along the Thames and then passing through a grand gate.

Since the outer buildings of the complex were newer than the White Tower, the royal family eventually moved into them, leaving the tower to be used as a formal gathering hall and an armory. (One benefit of the new lodgings was rudimentary toilets that funneled into the Thames, rather than the medieval garderobes of the White Tower, which had simply dropped royal excrement directly into the courtyard.) Other sections of the outer buildings were turned into housing for the many people needed to run the palace—and for animals in the royal menagerie as well.

Throughout much of medieval history, monarchs exchanged exotic animals as gifts. The menagerie at the tower began around 1200 with King John's pet lions but grew with the addition of three leopards in 1235, a polar bear in 1252, and an African elephant in 1255. Over the next few centuries, the tower also housed camels, hyenas, bears, tigers,

kangaroos, baboons, and many other wild beasts, although the quality of care was often inadequate. The animals were rarely given enough space, and there are records of keepers feeding wine to the elephants, beer to the zebras, and nails to the ostriches, under the mistaken belief that they could consume iron. Despite this, the menagerie lasted at the tower longer than the monarchy did. King Henry II abandoned the tower in the early 1500s for a more modern residence, while the menagerie stayed until the 1830s, when most of the animals were transferred to the newly constructed London Zoo.

The tower served even longer as a prison. Over its history, several hundred people were jailed there, including such notable figures as Anne Boleyn, Sir Walter Raleigh, Guy Fawkes, and the sister of Queen Mary I, who later became Queen Elizabeth I. In its early years, the tower was used for high-status prisoners, who were allowed to purchase art and quality food to improve their stay. But in later centuries, being imprisoned at the tower became far more dangerous. The use of torture was approved, beheadings were conducted in front of the church, and the sons of Edward IV, the rightful heirs to the throne, were presumed murdered there at the behest of Edward's uncle Richard, who then named himself king. The tower even held German prisoners of war during World Wars I and II.

Today, the tower is a tourist attraction. Hundreds of thousands of people visit it annually. While the historic buildings are of interest, the main draw is the crown jewels. The Jewel House is now located in what was originally an army barracks, set between the White Tower and the pit that had housed the lions. Each day, up to 20,000 visitors will snake through a series of windowless rooms before passing the jewels on a moving walkway. At night, the Jewel House is sealed off with steel doors that are six inches thick and weigh two tons apiece. In addition, the sturdy outer gates of the tower complex are locked tight, and the grounds are patrolled by the Yeoman Warders, an elite group of retired soldiers. Each Warden has served for at least twenty-two years in the British Armed Forces, and all of them live at the tower, in housing built into the outer wall.

Milana Moon was well aware of this. She knew that breaking into the Jewel House at night would be a fool's errand. However, there was one part of her planned heist that needed to be done in the wee hours of the morning, which was why Dante was perched on the roof of a nearby building at six a.m., carefully loading a foam ball into a T-shirt cannon.

London has grown dramatically since the construction of the tower. It isn't just that the size and population have exploded; the ground of the city itself is much higher than it once was. To protect against floods, the waterfront along both sides of the Thames has been shored up, and the modern city is built atop this, leaving the tower complex in a large sunken depression. The stone walls that once formed such a formidable barrier to attack are now only a few feet higher than the streets that run past them, while the White Tower, which was once the tallest and most impressive building in London, is now dwarfed by everything else around it. The Tower Bridge, which spans the Thames close by, looms high above the tower, while the downtown skyline is dominated by glass-and-steel skyscrapers. Even the blocky, routine office buildings located on the surrounding roads are enormous by medieval standards, making the White Tower, on its sunken patch

of land, look downright puny.

Dante was on the roof of one of those neighboring buildings. Directly across the street from the northeastern corner of the tower was an unassuming four-story brick building that housed a communal-office rental business. Using the doctored documents from the Scottish forger, it had been easy for Dante to set up an account there. He had purchased a private office option, which gave him twenty-four-hour access to the location, then entered the building early in the morning. At the time, there was only a single sleepy security guard on duty, who barely even glanced at Dante as he came in.

London is located farther north than all of the forty-eight contiguous United States; in October, the sun doesn't rise there until after seven a.m. So at six, the sky was still dark.

Dante had taken the service staircase up to the roof, then easily jimmied the lock to give himself access.

Across the street, the White Tower was illuminated so brightly that the building practically glowed in the night. However, the lighting was designed to display the building to passersby, who could only see the upper stories over the ancient fortress walls. So all the floodlights were angled upward, which left most of the twelve acres of land around the White Tower shrouded in shadow.

Dante had bought the foam ball at a craft shop for less than a pound. The T-shirt cannon had cost considerably more—over a thousand pounds—but money was no object for Charlie, and they needed the highest quality cannon possible, because Dante needed to fire it accurately over a long distance.

T-shirt cannons were officially designed for use at sporting events; cheerleaders launched free team clothing into the stands with them. They used compressed air instead of gunpowder, which made them relatively harmless. When Dante was young, he had built a similar device out of PVC pipe, duct tape, and an air compressor, which he had used to fire potatoes down the street. The cannon he held now had an adjustable range of up to 250 feet—although that was for a T-shirt, which weighed considerably more than the foam ball. Dante had spent several hours the previous day practicing with the cannon in a park well outside London and found that, from the height he was now at, he could easily fire the foam ball several hundred yards.

Dante was handling the ball very carefully, because there was explosive inside it.

He and Milana had made it themselves, buying the various elements they needed—like fertilizer and potash—separately so as to not raise suspicion. The explosive was extremely powerful, even in small amounts. It wouldn't go off without a trigger, but Dante was still cautious with it; he didn't like to be cavalier around explosives.

The security check to enter the Tower of London was far more rigorous than the security check to enter the office building. The Tower used the same system that passengers had to pass through to get on airplanes, with X-ray scanners. It wouldn't have been possible to bring the explosive onto the property that way.

However, once tourists were inside the tower complex, there was no additional security to enter the Jewel House. So all Dante needed to do was get the explosive over the wall and into a place where it wouldn't be noticed.

The White Tower was mostly surrounded by open lawns and stone plazas. But the

southern edge of the lawn was fringed with ivy. It was a relatively small target to hit, and T-shirt cannons weren't particularly accurate, but Dante was a crack shot, and he had practiced long enough to get a good feel for the launcher. The problem was he only had one shot. If he missed, the foam ball with the explosive would be out in the open, where it would surely be discovered by one of the Yeoman Warders.

It was a cold and moonless night, with a slight breeze coming off the Thames.

Dante calculated how much pressure he would need to hit his target, then recalculated it several more times to make sure.

He positioned himself on the roof in the same way a sniper would, tightly bracing the T-shirt cannon so that it wouldn't shift when he fired it. Then he held his breath and pulled the trigger.

The cannon fired with a loud pop of air, but even at that early hour, there were enough cars moving on the street below to cover the noise.

The black foam ball sailed across the street and over the fortification wall. It flew through the gap between a lookout tower and the building that housed the cafeteria, barely missed a low-hanging tree branch—and plunked into the clump of ivy, exactly as Dante had intended.

He grinned, pleased with himself, then called Milana.

"How'd it go?" she asked.

"Perfectly," Dante reported. "Proceed to phase two."

THIRTEEN

When the Tower of London opened to tourists at nine a.m., Milana and Charlie were the tenth and eleventh visitors in line.

The first tourists always made an impression. The security guards would remember them. But by the tenth, the job would have already become routine. There would be a line of eager people waiting to get in, and the guards would be trying to move them along as fast as possible.

Milana and Charlie still wanted to get in early, so they could grab the foam ball with the explosive quickly, before anyone discovered it. So they let a few people go before them and then got in line.

They were dressed to attract as little attention as possible, in basic, sensible clothing. Neither carried anything but their cell phones, which allowed them to quickly pass through the scanners without having to need any bags X-rayed.

Most of the tourists immediately turned left after entering the complex, following the stone passageway between the inner and outer walls of the castle to where the first tour of the day would gather. In addition to protecting the tower, the Yeoman Warders were also tasked with giving tours of the grounds, which were renowned for being both informative and funny. The warders on the tours dressed in traditional, ornate outfits, which dated back several centuries, although Milana and Charlie knew there were plenty of other warders around in plain clothes.

The remaining tourists headed directly for the Jewel House. Milana and Charlie followed them into the main courtyard, then veered off toward the clump of ivy.

The foam ball was there, tucked among the leaves, exactly where Dante had put it. Milana quickly stowed it in the pocket of her sweater.

Across the central lawn, beyond the White Tower, the Jewel House was just opening. The tower staff had erected a rope maze in front of the entrance, preparing for long lines of visitors later in the day, but for now, tourists could walk right in.

Milana and Charlie held back. It was too early to try to obtain the prism. The Yeoman Warders would be at their most alert first thing in the morning. And besides, Milana and Charlie still had more preparations to make the heist work perfectly.

There was a pedestrian walk along the top of the outer wall of the tower. Historically, it had been used by guards on patrol, but now it was open to tourists. Charlie and Milana accessed it via a stone stairway beside St. Thomas's Tower, which stretched above the Water Gate. Centuries earlier, this had been the main point of entry to the tower. The Thames had flowed right up to it, and a wharf had been where the security lines now were.

The location gave Charlie and Milana a good view of all the visitors coming through the entrance. They pretended to read the informational plaques and take photos while keeping an eye on the new arrivals.

After a few minutes, Milana said, "Here we go."

A school group was filing through the entrance on a class trip. The children all looked to be about Charlie's age and were dressed in their official uniforms. The boys wore blazers with button-down shirts and ties, while the girls had long plaid skirts and sweaters. There were seventy-seven tweens in all, and the overwhelmed chaperones already had their hands full trying to control them. The moment they were through the gates, the students scattered in all directions, ignoring the adults' pleas for them to stay together.

Charlie carefully scrutinized each one, looking for someone who would serve their needs.

But then something caught her attention.

It was in the passage between the defensive walls, in the direction of where Isaac Newton had lived as master of the mint. There were now dozens of tourists in this area. Many were gathered around one of the Yeoman Warders, who had just begun the first tour of the morning. The warder had a booming voice that echoed off the fortification walls and carried to where Charlie stood. The other tourists in the passage were either hurrying to join the tour or consulting their souvenir maps, trying to get their bearings and figure out where to go first.

But one person appeared to be staring at Charlie.

She couldn't see their face—or tell if it was a man or a woman. They stood in the shadow of an enclosed bridge that spanned the passage and they wore a long coat and a baseball cap pulled low over their eyes. The person was too tall to have been Kenji and not broad enough to have been either of the thugs who had accompanied him.

Charlie couldn't guarantee that the stranger was actually staring at her; it was just an eerie sense she felt.

She turned to Milana to get her attention. "Hey."

"What?" Milana didn't look at her, but kept her eyes locked on her targets.

Charlie instantly realized she should have done the same thing. Because when she turned back to look for the mysterious person again, they were gone. "Never mind," she said. "It's nothing."

"How about her?" Milana asked, pointing at one of the school girls.

Charlie shifted her attention. The girl looked to be about the same age as Charlie, and the same height, with the same hair color as well. The tween had a disdainful too-cool-for-school attitude and was making it abundantly clear that she had no interest in visiting the tower. She immediately broke off from her class and headed for the women's room.

"Yeah," Charlie said. "Her."

"Go get her."

The women's room was built into the very wall they were standing atop. Charlie scrambled down the closest set of stairs and ducked into the bathroom just behind the schoolgirl.

It was still early in the day. No one else was in the room.

The moment the girl was through the door, she plucked a vape pen out of her pocket.

“Class trip, huh?” Charlie asked, nice and friendly.

The schoolgirl snorted in disgust but said nothing.

“What if I told you I could get you out of a whole day here?” Charlie said.

The girl turned to her, suddenly intrigued. “How?”

“I’ll give you five hundred pounds for your uniform.”

The schoolgirl grinned as though she had just won the lottery. “Deal.”

Five minutes later, Charlie emerged from the bathroom, wearing the schoolgirl’s uniform.

The schoolgirl, now wearing Charlie’s clothes, quickly headed for the exit. Without her uniform, none of the distant chaperones took notice of her. She slipped out of the tower, thrilled to have ditched the field trip, and headed off into the city.

Milana came down from the viewing area atop the wall and joined Charlie.

At the same time, close by, Dante passed through the entrance. He was also dressed inconspicuously and carrying nothing but his cellphone.

He glanced at Milana, who gave him a slight nod, indicating they were good to go.

The tower had been open for twenty minutes. There were now a good number of tourists, although it still wasn’t terribly crowded. The rope maze outside the Jewel House wasn’t being used yet.

It was time.

Milana and Charlie headed for the Jewel House.

London is one of the most heavily monitored cities in the world.

To combat crime, the city has installed a massive network of closed-circuit television cameras, known as the CCTV system. There are rumored to be nearly a million cameras in the city, which means there are 1,500 within each square mile, or dozens within each block. They are mounted on lampposts and buildings and bridges; they are in every subway corridor, on public buses, and built into ATMs. It is estimated that every person in London is recorded by them at least seventy times per day.

The cameras operated by the city of London all funnel their data to a central processing center, which is officially operated by the London Police but which routinely grants access to the British intelligence services—and occasionally to foreign intelligence agencies as well.

At Agent Khatti’s urging, Arthur Zell had requested access.

He had made sure the request hadn’t come directly from his office, because the director of the CIA asking for something like that would have grabbed a lot of attention. But he had his most high-ranking liaison with MI6 handle it, to ensure that it was taken seriously. The liaison claimed that the CIA was searching for three people wanted in conjunction with plotting terrorist activities targeting the United States.

The city of London had been enhancing its facial recognition systems for years. Now if given a photo of a subject—or better yet, several photos—the system could keep an electronic eye out for them.

Agent Khatti was not allowed into the processing center, but then, she didn’t have to

be there. She simply needed the system to be on the lookout for Dante, Milana, and Charlie, and for someone to notify her if they were spotted.

Khatti had no idea if her targets were heading to London, but it seemed to be a reasonably safe bet. After all, she knew they were in Great Britain, looking for something that Newton had discovered, and Newton had spent most of his later life in London.

Meanwhile, if her targets tried to leave the country, every airport, train station, and boat harbor was monitored by CCTV cameras as well.

Khatti and her team were set up in a CIA safe house in London. At nine thirty that morning, she received a message informing her that the photos of her targets had been added to the system and that, if the techs got a hit, they would notify her immediately.

The hunt was on.

FOURTEEN

Charlie and Milana entered the Jewel House slightly ahead of Dante, to give the impression that they weren't all together. Charlie had pulled her hair into a ponytail to make herself look younger. In her schoolgirl uniform beside Milana, she appeared to be a sixth or seventh grader being chaperoned by a teacher.

The first few rooms of the Jewel House were mostly empty save for a bit of historical information. Then came a darkened room where there was a short documentary about the crown jewels, although most of the chairs for it were empty.

The room after that held the jewels themselves.

It was a long room, with the jewels lined up in thick glass cases. To prevent crowding around the cases, moving walkways carried tourists past on both sides of them, although if anyone wanted to spend a bit more time viewing the jewels, there was a large raised platform to the side. You could even backtrack through the room across the platform, then ride past the jewels on the moving walkways once again.

A security guard was stationed at the far end of the room. He wasn't a member of the Yeoman Warders. The man's job was to be on the lookout for any signs of trouble, but like most museum guards who Charlie had encountered, he appeared to be bored stiff.

The room was dark and somber, without any ornamentation, so that all attention would be focused on the jewels. The walls, floor, and stands for the glass cases were all painted black, while every light in the room was aimed at the royal objects.

But even without such dramatic settings, it would have been hard not to be entranced by the jewels.

There were several crowns in the collection, along with scepters and other regalia used in the coronation ceremonies. Each item had been designed to display the wealth and power of the British Empire. They were fashioned with gold, silver, and a stunning amount of precious gems. In all, the crown jewels contained over 23,000 gemstones, some of which were the largest ever seen. The Cullinan I, the largest cut diamond in the world, was embedded in the Sovereign's Scepter, while the Imperial State Crown featured an enormous ruby and two massive blue sapphires.

St. Edward's Crown, the one Newton had sent them to find, was the centerpiece of the collection. Created specifically for the coronation of the kings of England, it was breathtaking. It was solid gold and embellished with 444 separate gems, which made it so heavy that, despite its historical significance, many monarchs had chosen not to be coronated with it and opted for a lighter crown instead.

Unfortunately, the abundance of gems created an additional problem: figuring out which one was actually not a gemstone at all, but the prism that Newton had hidden

among them. The crown didn't have any of the massive diamonds that bedecked some of the other royal regalia, but there was still an overwhelming number of rubies, amethysts, garnets, peridots, topazes, and sapphires. Even armed with Newton's diagram depicting the location and shape of the prism, Charlie and Milana still had to ride past St. Edward's Crown eight times before they were convinced they knew where it was.

The prism was set on the left side of the crown, amid a riot of other stones. It matched the shape indicated by Newton's notes, and it was yellow, as dictated by his clue.

Now the dark room worked to Charlie and Milana's advantage. Everyone was so focused on the crown jewels that no one was watching the other tourists.

Milana and Charlie moved to the end of the viewing platform closest to the entrance and waited for the right moment.

The flow of people passing the crown jewels wasn't constant. The line of tourists would occasionally stop in the previous room; sometimes the people at the front got distracted by the video on display, or there was a tourist who needed a bit more time. This meant that, despite the popularity of the jewels, every now and then there would be almost no one on the moving walkways.

Milana carefully removed the explosive from the foam ball, where it had been protected since she had recovered it. The explosive was an adhesive putty, and it was connected to a small detonator with a transmitter that Milana could control from her phone.

After a few minutes, there was a gap in the line of people coming into the room.

"It's time," Milana said, then ushered Charlie off the platform and onto the moving walkway. They quickly strode past the first few items on display until they came to the case that held St. Edward's Crown. Milana deftly stuck the explosive putty to the side of the glass case as they passed it.

Ahead of them, a few tourists were still on the moving walkway, gazing at the last of the crown jewels. Behind them, more tourists entered the room.

Milana wasn't worried about the other people. She had taken precautions to ensure that everyone would be too far from the blast to be harmed. But they were close enough to be startled by it, which was part of the plan.

"Duck," Milana told Charlie.

Both of them dropped to the floor, curling into protective balls, with their arms wrapped around their heads.

At the very same moment, Milana triggered the detonator.

Milana and Dante had built the explosive to be loud, bright, and smoky, so that it would appear big and frightening. It went off with a tremendous bang and a blinding flash of light and instantly clouded the room. The glass case of St. Edward's Crown was shattered and thrown to the floor.

Lying on the moving walkway, Charlie screamed at the top of her lungs, as though she was in terrible pain.

This was an act. Other than a few nicks from flying shards of glass, she hadn't been hurt at all. She only wanted to give the impression that she had been.

Many of the other tourists were screaming as well, in genuine shock and fear. Many

children—and a few adults—burst into tears. One large man passed out from fright.

Alarms began to wail, adding to the chaos.

The security guard stationed in the room was overwhelmed by all the noise and pandemonium. He didn't seem to know where to look first.

However, Milana knew it wouldn't be long before the far more competent Yeoman Warders arrived. So she went to work quickly. Shielded by the smoke, she raced back to where St. Edward's Crown lay amidst the remains of its shattered glass case. She swiftly located Newton's yellow glass prism and easily popped it free from its place. Milana figured that the precious gems were probably fixed more solidly, but it seemed that Newton had taken care to ensure that his prism could be removed without damaging it.

Then she raced back to Charlie's side.

Charlie was still balled on the moving walkway, screaming. The walkway had carried her a few more yards along until it had been shut down. Charlie had been hiding a few small packets of fake blood in her pockets. It hadn't been hard to get at that time of year. Halloween was approaching, and there were plenty of pop-up costume shops selling the stuff. She and Milana had bought a few packets of multiple brands and then experimented in a hotel room to see which looked the most like the real thing. Two weren't even close. One was too thick; it looked like melted raspberry gelatin. One was more of a Day-Glo red. But one looked decently like blood. It had been easy to smuggle through the X-ray scanners at the entrance to the tower. In the midst of the chaos, Charlie had burst the packets open and smeared the red substance on her face and torso.

Milana knelt by Charlie's side, tucked the prism into Charlie's pocket, then wailed, "My sister's hurt! Someone please help us!"

Dante had been seated in the room before the crown jewels, pretending to watch the educational video, waiting for the telltale blast. The moment it had gone off, he had sprung to his feet and raced into the jewel room. He also had an act to put on.

"I'm an EMT!" he shouted, using the general term for an emergency medical technician. "Is anyone hurt?"

A worried mother close by yelled for his help, wanting him to tend to her screaming children. Dante dutifully came to their aid; he'd received emergency medical training at the CIA and could perform a basic checkup. There was certainly going to be an investigation after this incident, and Dante wanted to make sure that when people were questioned, they remembered a helpful EMT being on the scene. In addition, he wanted to give Milana a bit of time to get the prism—and he wanted to make sure that the kids weren't actually hurt.

They weren't. They were simply frightened. Dante looked them over, told their mother that they were okay, and suggested that they evacuate the smoky, frightening aftermath of the explosion quickly to help them calm down. Then he took the pulse of the man who had passed out and assured his worried wife that he was alive and well.

Then Milana started yelling for help.

Dante ran down the moving walkway through the haze of smoke until he found Milana and Charlie. "I'm an EMT," he announced again. "Let me take a look at her."

By this point, the Yeoman Warders had entered the Jewel House and were racing

toward the scene of the explosion. Their reaction time had been swift. One wore the traditional Yeoman Warder outfit—he had been giving a tour close by when the blast occurred—while several others were in plain clothes.

The oldest one, who sported a gray military crewcut, immediately began shouting orders. He was obviously the senior ranking officer. He wanted the Jewel House locked down, but at the same time, he wanted the wounded tended to.

“This girl needs an ambulance immediately!” Dante yelled, loud and clear enough to grab the warder’s attention.

The crewcut warder hurried over and winced at the sight of what appeared to be a wounded teenage schoolgirl, screaming in pain. Dante wasn’t sure whether the man was actively concerned for Charlie—or if he was concerned about the public relations disaster of having a young tourist wounded in an attack at the tower under his watch—but it didn’t really matter. “What’s the situation?” he asked.

“She’s got multiple severe lacerations and cardiac arrhythmia suggesting blood loss.” Dante tore a strip of cloth from his own shirt and made a show of fashioning a tourniquet from it. “She needs to get to a hospital right away.”

“Please help us!” Milana pleaded.

“There’s an ambulance on the premises,” the senior warder informed her. He called for it on his radio, then cased the rest of the room, as if worried about what other injuries he might find.

“There’s a man passed out down there, but otherwise all right,” Dante informed him. “And there’s some very frightened children who ought to be taken outside as soon as possible.”

The guard looked at Dante curiously.

“I’m an EMT,” Dante explained. “Just happened to be visiting. I’ll stay with this girl. You deal with all that.” He waved to the rest of the disarray in the room around them. Dante had chosen his words carefully, making the senior warder’s decision for him when he said he would stay with Charlie.

The warder nodded his thanks and moved on, as there were plenty of other things that needed his attention. Even though he was concerned for the crown jewels, he didn’t appear to think that the young, wounded teenager in front of him might have been part of a heist. That was part of the advantage of having Charlie on the team.

By this point, some other Yeoman Warders were investigating the site of the blast and assessing the damage while others were tending to the startled guests.

Dante hoisted Charlie into his arms and yelled, “Clear a path! Injured girl coming through!” Then, with Milana beside him, he headed out of the Jewel House.

A majority of the other tourists were evacuating as well, under the direction of the Yeoman Warders, although a few were stubbornly headed back toward the crown jewels, intrigued to see what had happened. Everyone else was behaving properly, given the circumstances, moving in an orderly fashion toward the exits. They stepped aside when Dante came through with Charlie, many gasping with concern as they saw her.

Charlie felt slightly guilty about putting all of them through such an ordeal, but at the moment, she was more concerned with getting away. Everything had gone as planned so

far, but there was always a chance that some member of the Yeoman Warders would insist upon searching her and find the prism. She, Dante, and Milana had discussed this possibility; Charlie was only carrying a prism of glass, rather than an actual jewel, so in theory no one would think anything of it. But the prism still *looked* enough like a jewel that a Yeoman Warder might confiscate it or presume they were involved in the attack. The best option, at the moment, was to keep up the act of being wounded to make sure everyone was focused on getting her to a hospital as quickly as possible.

The ambulance was already parked directly outside the Jewel House. Two EMTs were waiting beside it. The back doors were open, and a gurney was at the ready.

One of the EMTs, a sturdy young man, rushed to their side. "We'll take her from here," he told Dante, reaching for Charlie. "Thanks for your help."

"No!" Charlie cried. "He saved me! I want him to come!"

"Sorry," the male EMT insisted. "Only family is allowed inside."

"Please," Milana implored him. "She's been through enough."

The EMT wavered a moment, then backed down. There was no point in enforcing regulations when a young girl's life was in danger. "All right."

Dante clambered into the back of the ambulance and laid Charlie on the gurney there. Milana and the two EMTs got in with them, while the driver started the engine.

The female EMT was about to close the rear doors when an overzealous member of the Yeoman Warders intervened. "Sorry," he said. "But the crown jewels have been attacked. We need to search these people before they leave the premises."

Charlie tensed on the gurney.

But then the female EMT gave the Yeoman Warder a devastating glare. "This kid's bleeding out and you want to frisk her? Bugger off." She slammed the door shut and called to the driver. "Let's go!"

The driver turned on the sirens and put the ambulance in gear. The plaza outside the Jewel House was packed with tourists, many of whom had come running to see what all the excitement was about, but they dutifully parted to let the ambulance pass, allowing it to move with decent speed through the tower grounds.

Still, there was a good distance to the exit, and the EMTs were well trained. Once they began to examine Charlie, it only took a few seconds before they realized something was wrong.

The red stuff smeared all over Charlie's face, her arms, and her clothes was not blood.

And despite what they had been told, there weren't any deep lacerations on her arms.

The male EMT started to say something, but before he could, Dante grabbed him from behind and clapped the mask from a canister of anesthetic over his nose and mouth.

On the other side of the gurney, Milana did the same thing to the other EMT.

Both EMTs struggled to get free, but the exertion only made them breathe harder, sucking more anesthetic into their lungs. The anesthetic was the perfect way to safely incapacitate the EMTs. Within seconds, both were unconscious. Dante and Milana gently lowered them to the floor and let them sleep.

The ambulance was a top-of-the-line model, so the driver sat in a separate compartment. She continued onward, unaware of what was happening in the rear of the

vehicle, fully focused on delivering the patient to the hospital as fast as possible.

Charlie, Dante, and Milana had deduced that the closest hospital to the Tower of London was St. Bartholomew's, and the most direct route led past St. Paul's Cathedral.

Charlie used some sanitizer and towels to clean the fake blood off her face and arms.

Once outside the tower, the ambulance pulled onto the main road and sped west into London. Several police cars passed, bubble lights flashing and sirens wailing as they raced in the opposite direction, heading for the Jewel House.

The Tower of London had been shut down, locking all visitors inside. The Yeoman Warders planned to search each and every one of them for stolen jewels as they left.

But Charlie, Dante, and Milana were already gone, taking Newton's precious prism with them.

FIFTEEN

The moment Varsha Khatti heard about the attack on the Jewel House, she called her contact at the CCTV tech center and asked to have all the camera feeds there searched for any sign of Dante, Milana, or Charlie. She figured that a theft at the place where Newton had lived and worked, a mere three days after the one in Cambridge, couldn't possibly be a coincidence.

Then Khatti and her team left the CIA safe house and headed for the tower in the CIA's black SUV.

There were three other agents on the team. Kyle Wexler was the one Khatti respected the most. He was sharp, fit, and competent. He had also worked with Dante Garcia several times. Jacinta Ford was the youngest member of the team, only two years out of the academy but an up-and-comer. Norman Theodorakis was nearly twice her age. He wasn't the brightest agent, but he was a big, tough bruiser who took orders well. It often helped to have someone like that on the team.

Theodorakis drove while the others called the contacts they had in law enforcement. They quickly pieced together much of the story of the attack on the Jewel House, as well as what steps had been taken to prevent the perpetrators from getting away. The Jewel House had been locked down, while a highly trained team of investigators and curators examined the premises. And the tower itself had been closed for the day. The unfortunate tourists who were visiting had all been forced into a single-file line to exit. Each person was going to be thoroughly searched before being allowed to leave. It was estimated that it might take eight hours to check every one of them.

But Khatti knew Dante Garcia well. Dante would have been fully aware of such security procedures. Khatti suspected that Dante was after something other than one of the crown jewels, but whatever it was, he certainly wouldn't have allowed himself to be caught in a position where he could be frisked for it.

No, thought Khatti. Dante Garcia would have never gone in without a good escape plan.

Which meant the police and the Yeoman Warders were wasting their time searching innocent people at the tower.

So Khatti and her team then went to work, trying to figure out if anyone had left the tower *before* the lockdown.

The traffic in London was notoriously bad. The SUV was crawling through gridlock.

Eventually, Wexler learned about the wounded girl who been taken from the tower in an ambulance. Two other people had gone with her, a vacationing EMT who had been nearby when she was hurt, and a woman who might have been an older sister or an aunt...

no one was quite clear.

That was enough for Khatti. She ordered her team to find out what hospital the ambulance had gone to and what had happened to the patient.

While waiting for that information, she heard back from her contact at CCTV. Sure enough, they'd had a hit. It was only a partial: A camera situated on one of the outer fortification walls at the tower had caught the side of Charlie Thorne's face. It hadn't been a strong enough match to originally trigger an alert in the system, but now that the techs knew to search for Charlie there, they could place her at the scene ten minutes before the explosion. She was exiting the women's room in a schoolgirl's uniform that she had obtained somehow.

Thorne was shrewd enough to lower her head after that to keep the cameras from spotting her face, but once the techs knew who she was and how she was dressed, they could use the other CCTV cameras at the tower to track her progress. They saw Charlie meet up with Milana Moon—who also kept her head down, but Khatti knew it was her—and head to the Jewel House.

At this point, Ford got some new information: The ambulance had arrived at St. Bartholomew's hospital, but the three people from the tower had no longer been inside. Instead, there were only two unconscious EMTs, who had been gassed with anesthetic. The driver reported that the three passengers had leapt out of the ambulance at some point along the route, but she had continued to the hospital with the EMTs, as she feared they might need medical attention themselves.

It didn't appear that anyone from the Yeoman Warders had followed up on the progress of the ambulance yet. Khatti was able to track down the driver and get her on the phone.

Khatti only had one question: Where had the passengers leapt out of the ambulance?

Once she had the answer, she informed Theodorakis there was a change of plans. They were no longer heading to the Tower of London.

Instead, they needed to get to St. Paul's Cathedral immediately.

Yoshi Yataro also immediately suspected Charlie Thorne had been involved in the incident at the Tower of London.

He had spent the last few days learning all he could about Charlie. To start that process, he had relied on the English CCTV camera system as well.

Yataro didn't have a liaison at CCTV; he didn't need one. His tech company had hacked into the system years before—as well as virtually every other similar system around the world. It had been a tremendous help to his security division on many occasions.

Cambridge wasn't as heavily monitored as London, but there were enough cameras to serve Yoshi's purposes, including several around Trinity College. It didn't take long to locate a screen grab of Charlie Thorne, and from there, it wasn't too hard to learn her identity.

It turned out, Yoshi had heard of her before.

There had always been rumors in the tech community about a young girl getting the best of the Lightning Corporation after they had stolen a program from her. Charlie Thorne had been suggested as the culprit, especially after she made the news by getting

accepted into a university at the age of twelve, but no one had ever been able to prove she was the thief—which just served as even greater testimony to her intelligence.

However, as of the previous February, young Miss Thorne's life had grown even more intriguing.

She had suddenly dropped out of school. The university newspaper reported that she was taking some time off as she had found the adjustment to college life as a tween to be difficult, but there were no direct statements from her. There hadn't been a story about Charlie since. She appeared to have vanished, but there was no record of any police investigation into her disappearance.

To Yoshi, the whole thing sounded like a government cover-up.

He knew the CIA had access to information about Newton's discovery. That was where he had gotten the information himself. And while Charlie had been escaping from Kenji at Cambridge, her accomplice had beaten one of Yoshi's best henchman in a fight. That sounded like a CIA handler. Which meant Charlie Thorne's involvement in all this was sanctioned by the Agency.

That was a problem.

And yet, Yoshi was undaunted. He had spent a great deal of time and money to track down Newton's discovery, and he wasn't about to let anyone take it from him. Even the CIA.

Yoshi had begun his quest decades earlier. Originally, he hadn't known about Newton's involvement; he had been seeking the item itself and stumbled across a rumor that the great scientist might have beaten him to its discovery by several centuries. That had blossomed into a full-blown obsession. Over the years, Yoshi had become an expert on the life of Isaac Newton. And so he was well aware that Newton had spent almost as much of his life living at the Tower of London as he had at Cambridge; therefore, it made sense that Newton might have hidden his discovery or a clue to its whereabouts there.

So Yoshi had his techs start searching the CCTV feeds for any sign of Charlie Thorne. Although he didn't have them focus on the Tower of London itself. If Charlie had stolen something from the Jewel Room, then the *last* place Yoshi would expect her to be afterward was the tower. A good thief would have an escape plan.

Instead, Yoshi ordered his techs to search the area *around* the Tower of London, starting in the minutes after the attack had occurred. He wanted the feeds from every camera within a half mile in every direction. That was thousands of cameras, which would take time, but there were algorithms to narrow down the process.

It took him a bit longer to get a lead than it had taken the CIA, because he didn't have their resources, but he got it.

Shortly after the attack, a single ambulance had left the tower. It headed west through the city, and after about half a mile, just a few blocks from St. Paul's Cathedral, it had stopped suddenly. A CCTV camera caught a glimpse of three people jumping out the back doors and fleeing down the street.

Two were adults. One was a teenager in a schoolgirl's uniform.

The image on the CCTV camera was too blurry to get a good look at any of them, but Yoshi had plenty of equipment at his disposal that could resolve an image like that. The

information went from the CCTV control center in London halfway around the globe to Yoshi's business complex in Tokyo, then bounced back to his hotel suite in London.

When the image arrived, it confirmed what Yoshi had suspected.

The girl was Charlie Thorne.

SIXTEEN

Charlie, Dante, and Milana had left the ambulance a few blocks away from St. Paul's Cathedral, right by the Mansion House Tube station, hoping to throw off anyone who might be tracking them. Then they headed on foot to the cathedral.

It wasn't hard to find. The building was massive.

It was built in the shape of an enormous cross nearly six hundred feet in length, twice as long as a football field. To prevent the colossal structure from sinking into the weak clay soil, Christopher Wren had had to design Europe's largest crypt and fill it with supporting columns. The cathedral had taken thirty-five years to build, and even though it had been completed in 1710, its dome was still one of the largest ever constructed. It weighed 65,000 tons and stood 365 feet tall. It had been the highest point in London until 1965, over 250 years.

Dante was daunted by the size of the building. "Newton's notes only say to put the prism on the dome," he noted as they worked their way toward it. "But he doesn't specify *where*. And that dome is gigantic. It could take us weeks to figure out where that prism goes."

"I don't think it will take long at all," Charlie said confidently. "Newton's directions say to place the prism where the sun will strike it on the summer solstice. So that means a spot on the eastern side. Then, it would have to be someplace high enough that Newton could guarantee the sun would strike it—where no other buildings or trees might block the light. And finally, not much of the exterior of the dome is accessible, but you can go *there*." She pointed at the top of the dome.

Dante looked up. Now that he focused, he could see there was a narrow viewing platform circling the base of the spire. Some tourists were on it, but they were so high above him, they appeared smaller than ants. "How do we get up there?"

"There's stairs," Charlie replied. "*Lots* of stairs. They've always been there. And even though Newton hid this discovery, he still needed it to be reachable. I mean, what's the point of leaving directions to a place if no one can get to it?"

"Makes sense to me," Milana said, but then found her attention drawn to the cathedral's pair of bell towers. They weren't as tall as the dome, but they still jutted quite high above the city. Each was capped with a large, knobby golden object. Milana squinted at them curiously. "Are those *pineapples*?"

"Yes," Charlie answered.

"Why are there pineapples on top of a church?" Dante asked.

"People were obsessed with pineapples back when this was built," Charlie explained. "They had been discovered in the Americas, but they were very hard to get. They could

cost up to five thousand pounds—and if people couldn't afford one, they would actually rent one to serve as the centerpiece of a party to make everyone think they were rich. So they became a sign of wealth and prosperity. Christopher Wren was so wild about them, he actually wanted one up on top of the dome, instead of a cross." Charlie pointed back to the very top of St. Paul's, where an enormous golden cross topped the stone spire.

They arrived at the cathedral. The blocks to the east and north of it were full of lawns and gardens, creating a small oasis in the bustling city. The main tourist entrance was on the opposite side. A busy street lined with shops ran along the south side of the building, so they took the northern side, which was reserved for pedestrians and, in theory, had fewer CCTV cameras. It was still packed with Londoners and tourists, however. Milana scanned the crowd as she walked, on the alert for any sign of trouble.

"Could this discovery be another equation?" Dante asked.

"Why would you think that?" Charlie replied.

"Well, Newton's just as famous for coming up with equations as Einstein was. The guy *invented* calculus for Pete's sake. And he figured out all the laws of thermodynamics too. So maybe he came up with an equation as powerful and dangerous as Einstein did."

Charlie shook her head. "I don't think so. Newton was brilliant, for sure. But he didn't know about atoms. And without that knowledge, he couldn't create anything as dangerous as Pandora. Not on a global scale, at least."

"So what do you think it is, then?"

"I honestly don't know. Newton was interested in so many things. Einstein was primarily focused on physics throughout his career, and Darwin focused on evolution, but Newton was fascinated by optics and physics and mathematics and metallurgy and alchemy and—"

"Alchemy?" Dante interrupted, incredulous. "Wasn't that just a bunch of pseudoscientific nonsense?"

"Not exactly. Alchemists might have had some misguided ideas, but they were still earnestly trying to understand how the universe worked. And it's not cool to judge them from our modern standpoint. Four hundred years from now, future people might think that *our* understanding of the universe and time and energy looks like nonsense as well," Charlie said.

"I suppose," Dante admitted.

They came up the steps on the western side of St. Paul's, purchased tickets, and passed through the doors. Inside, the cavernous space was awe-inspiring. To each side of them were small chapels, designed in elaborate baroque style, set off with soaring marble arches, while the ornate altar loomed far ahead. Every visitor had lowered their voices or fallen silent in reverence.

Charlie followed suit and spoke in a whisper as they went in search of the stairs. "Newton revolutionized scientific research. He'd do anything to find the answers he needed, even if it meant performing experiments on himself. Like, when he wanted to learn how we saw color, he actually jammed a needle into his eye to stimulate his retina. His home was filled with notebooks, and those were filled with pages like this." Charlie held up the piece of paper with Newton's clues on it. "He would get so obsessed with his

ideas that sometimes he would forget to eat for days on end. Often, when he discovered something—even if it was completely revolutionary—he didn't tell anyone about it because he worried that all the attention would keep him from further studies. Or sometimes he just set it aside and forgot about it. Like the laws of planetary motion."

"Then how do we know he discovered them?" Dante asked.

"We might not have found out if it wasn't for Edmund Halley."

"The guy who discovered the comet?"

"Exactly. Halley was one of the few people Newton actually got along with. One day, he dropped by to see Newton at Cambridge, and Newton casually mentioned that he'd worked out planetary motion and figured out that the orbits of all the planets are actually ellipses. In fact, he'd worked it out five years earlier but never bothered to tell anyone. Halley went nuts, because this was huge. All the other scientists had been trying to figure this out for years without any luck. So he asked Newton for the math—but Newton couldn't find it. It was lost somewhere in all his notebooks. So he told Halley he'd just do the math all over again, which took a couple months. When Halley finally saw it, he forced Newton to publish it—and that's how the *Principia Mathematica* came to be. If it hadn't been for Halley, Newton might never have received the credit. Someone else would have eventually figured it out."

They arrived at the center of the cathedral and found themselves under the great dome. From below, it was somehow even more impressive. It was decorated with intricate mosaics and beautiful paintings depicting religious scenes, while a beam of sunlight streamed through a circular opening in the crown at the top.

Four massive structures supported the dome, setting off the north and south transepts of the cathedral. The entrance to the stairs was located at the northeastern support, beside a small information booth manned by a volunteer. Charlie started that way, and the others followed her.

Dante said, "If Newton hid his discovery in the dome, he must have had to tell Christopher Wren about it, right? In order to set all this up."

"That makes sense," Charlie agreed. "Newton and Wren were both early members of the Royal Society—along with Edmund Halley. Newton even served as president of the society later in his life. I think the headquarters were located somewhere around here."

"Do you think the Royal Society was aware of what he discovered?"

"It's possible. Although Newton could be awfully secretive about things." Charlie held up the sheet of clues again. "He encoded plenty of things besides this."

"Do you have *any* idea what we might be looking for here?"

"It could be just about *anything*. An incredibly deadly poison, or a way to focus light so intensely that it could be used as a weapon, or a new form of radioactive metal. Whatever the case, hopefully, we'll have our answer soon enough." Charlie showed her ticket to the volunteer and started through the doorway to the stairs.

But Milana caught her arm and held her back. "I don't like this," she whispered.

Charlie gave her an annoyed stare. "Why not?"

"There's only one way up and one way down," Milana explained. "So it's easy for someone to box us in up there. And it'll take way too long for us to go up, get whatever

Newton hid and get back down again. Given what we just did at the tower, it's too risky to try this now."

Charlie gave an exasperated sigh. "But we got away just fine! And every policeman in town is at the tower."

"It's not the police I'm worried about."

"But we're *here*," Charlie insisted. "We can't turn back now."

"Yes we can. We'll lay low for a bit and then come back later."

"How much later? Days? Weeks?"

"I don't know. This isn't the place to discuss this." Milana glanced at the ticket taker nearby. "We're making a scene."

Charlie looked to Dante. "You're okay with this?"

"Absolutely," Dante replied. "If Milana thinks this is a bad idea, then it's a bad idea. Let's go." He guided Charlie back toward the exit.

Charlie didn't argue, although inside, she was seething. She was convinced that this was a bad call. They had always planned to come right to St. Paul's from the tower, and it still seemed to her that this was the optimal time to search for what Newton had hidden. Delaying it would only give their enemies time to catch up to them.

So far, her instincts had almost always been right about things like this.

She continued along with Dante and Milana silently, taking in the beauty of the cathedral. Now that Milana had aborted the mission, Dante seemed edgier. Both were on high alert.

So when they reached the exit for the cathedral, both stepped outside first to case the area for any sign of trouble.

Charlie didn't follow them. The moment they were through the door, she turned around and hurried back for the stairs to the dome.

Dante and Milana would be upset with her for disobeying them, but once she found Newton's discovery, she knew they would admit they'd been wrong, and everything would work out just fine.

Or so she hoped.

SEVENTEEN

Dante and Milana were both livid when they realized what Charlie had done. But they couldn't let their emotions get the best of them. They had to think quickly.

The cathedral exit was designed so that they couldn't go back through it. Instead, they had to return through the main visitor entrance, and there was now a small line for that.

"You go after her," Milana said. "I'll keep watch for trouble."

Dante nodded agreement, feeling like a fool for letting Charlie get the better of him. He went right to the front of the line, and when tourists began to protest, he held up his ticket and said, "I was just inside, but my daughter didn't follow me out. Do you mind if I cut?" The genuine concern in his voice was convincing. The tourists let him go ahead, and the ticket taker allowed him back in once again.

But he had still squandered precious seconds. By the time he reentered, he could see that Charlie was already heading into the staircase, far across the cathedral. He hurried that way as quickly as he could without running, not wanting to get stopped by any church officials.

Meanwhile, Milana posted herself on a bench under the shade of a tree where she could keep an eye on the area around the cathedral doors. She hoped that she was wrong, and that no trouble would arise, but she had a sinking feeling that this wouldn't be the case.

Hurry, Dante, she thought.

There were 528 stairs to the top of the dome at St. Paul's. That translated into about fifty-three stories.

Charlie knew that was a lot to climb, but she figured that she had been training hard recently and was in excellent shape, so maybe she could run right up.

It proved much harder than she had expected.

The first stretch had gone well enough. A spiral staircase led up 257 steps. It was relatively wide, which had given Charlie ample room to breeze past the dozens of tourists who were moving more slowly than she was. The stairs led to the Whispering Gallery, a viewing area that circled the interior of the dome, ninety feet above the cathedral floor. There, the base of the dome was so perfectly round that a whisper on one side of it would reflect off the curves to a person on the other, so that two people could converse across the gap. It afforded an amazing chance to get a closer look at the art in the interior of the dome, but Charlie had no time for more than a cursory glance before she continued onward.

From that point, things got more difficult. The spiral staircase to the next level was much narrower, and the tourists climbing it were getting tired and moving more slowly.

By now Charlie was getting tired too. Still, she was able to go faster than the people ahead of her, so at any chance she got, she asked to slip by, although on occasion, she had to rudely squeeze past people.

Another 119 steps up, she arrived at the Stone Gallery, a large balcony that ringed the exterior of the base of the dome. Charlie could see through the door that the views were impressive, but she immediately headed into the staircase that led up even higher.

To support the massive dome, Christopher Wren had come up with an ingenious design: There was actually a second dome nestled inside the first to provide a framework for it. The inner dome was more rounded; this was the one that created the ceiling that could be seen from inside the cathedral. Meanwhile, the outer dome was oblong, like half of an egg. The staircase to the top wound between the domes and was far more narrow and claustrophobic than the others.

By now Charlie's legs were aching, and her lungs were burning. The staircase was crowded with tired and grumpy tourists, some of whom were in no mood to have someone shove past them. But Charlie soldiered onward, although often, she found it impossible to get around someone and would have to bide her time until an opportunity presented itself.

To do all of this took much longer than she had expected. Still, there was no way to backtrack. The route up to the dome only went in one direction, while a separate set of stairs came down. As far as Charlie was concerned, the only thing that made sense was to continue onward, even though time was slipping away, and Dante and Milana were certainly growing angrier at her by the minute.

Twenty stories down, Dante was having a far more difficult time. Hurrying up the stairs was taking a heavy toll on him, and there were a lot of tourists blocking the way between him and Charlie. He wasn't able to slip past them as easily as a slight young girl could. He was tired and achy and out of breath, which all made him increasingly livid at Charlie and her rash decision.

And then the thing he feared most happened.

He had just passed the Whispering Gallery when he got a call from Milana. He answered it, gasping for breath.

"The CIA is here," Milana reported.

Dante stumbled over a step in surprise. "You're sure?"

"It's Varsha Khatti."

Dante was so caught off guard, he had to stop. He immediately felt shocked and betrayed that Khatti was the one coming after him, but he quickly realized that of course Zell wouldn't have told her the truth. Khatti was just doing her job. And she was a formidable agent. "Anyone else?"

"Wexler too. And two other agents I don't know. A young woman and an older piece of muscle. Do you have Charlie?"

"I'm not even close."

A few moments passed while Milana weighed her options. Then she said, "I'm going to decoy them."

"No!" Dante was so upset, he spoke much louder than he had intended. The word

echoed through the staircase, drawing stares from the other climbers.

“There’s no other option. They’re heading for the cathedral, and if they target the stairs, you’re stuck. I need to even the odds.”

“Milana, wait...,” Dante began.

Milana didn’t let him finish. “Get Charlie and get her out of there,” she said. “Then meet me at the burrow.” She hung up before he could protest any further.

Dante stared at the phone a moment longer, even angrier at Charlie now. Then he started climbing again.

High above him, unaware of what was going on below, Charlie finally reached the top of the stairs. A doorway led out onto the Golden Gallery, a narrow stone ledge with an iron railing. There were only a few other tourists who had made the climb gathered on it, but in the confined space, even that many made it crowded. Above them, the spire, as thick as a house, stretched another several stories upward, topped with a massive golden cross, while below them, the curve of the dome dropped away sharply. The views of London were spectacular, but Charlie had no interest in them. She had already been in the dome twice as long as she had expected. She needed to find Newton’s hiding place as fast as she could.

Her phone buzzed in her pocket. She removed it and saw three words from Dante.

CIA. Abort now.

Charlie was seized with anxiety. She’d made the wrong call. But she couldn’t bring herself to turn away. Not when she was so close.

This was a common problem, even among veteran CIA agents. Aborting a mission when the goal was in sight was extremely difficult. It was something they had to practice at the Agency. But Charlie hadn’t received any of this training. Despite her great intelligence, she was a normal teenager in many other ways. To her, it seemed like turning back would be a mistake, because then all the trouble she’d caused would have been for nothing.

She glanced up at the spire high above her, worried that Newton’s discovery was hidden somewhere on it. She was an adept rock climber but had no desire to scale something at this height without any safety gear. But then she reasoned that such safety gear wouldn’t have even existed in Newton’s time, so it was unlikely that the scientist would have hidden his discovery up there. It was far more likely to be close to the Golden Gallery, where it was accessible.

So Charlie circled the narrow ledge, focusing on the building. All the other tourists were facing the opposite direction, staring at the view. Charlie then wondered how many people had *ever* looked at the building up here.

The stonework of the spire wasn’t particularly ornate, especially when compared to the interior of the dome, although there were some artistic flourishes. There were large alcoves and soaring columns, but for the most part, the gray stone was smooth and polished.

Charlie reached the eastern side of the balcony and froze in her tracks.

Set back in the eastern-facing alcove, there was a small slot in the stone. It was shallow enough that no one would have noticed it unless they were looking for it. Charlie

consulted Newton's page of clues. The slot matched the one in his drawing.

Her heart racing with excitement, Charlie carefully removed Newton's prism from her pocket. It was windy up on the Golden Gallery, and Charlie was suddenly overcome with the fear that the prism might slip from her grasp and tumble down the side of the dome.

She pressed it into the slot. It fit perfectly. There was a slight click, and the prism remained in place.

Now Charlie had to calculate where the sun would be on the summer solstice. She turned away from the alcove and considered the horizon to the east. She took out her phone, activated an app that gave her exact position north of the equator, and then made some mental calculations.

Her phone started to ring. Dante.

Only, Charlie couldn't answer the phone at the moment. She needed it for something else.

She considered the other tourists around her. Nobody was paying any attention to her.

Charlie turned on the flashlight on her phone, then trained the beam on the prism from the proper angle.

The beam refracted inside the prism, revealing that there was more to the piece of glass than was visible to the naked eye. It appeared to have been specially crafted to bend the light in an extremely specific way. Charlie presumed it was focusing the beam through a hole in the stonework.

And yet, nothing happened.

The stones remained just as solid and unyielding as they had for three hundred years.

Charlie's heart sank. It appeared that she'd done something wrong.

But then there was a sudden groan from inside the spire, like a very old piece of machinery coming to life after centuries of disuse.

Charlie watched in astonishment as a piece of stone lowered in the alcove, revealing a hidden space. Resting atop it was a small metal safe the size of a tissue box. A key lay beside it.

Charlie sighed with relief. She grabbed the safe and the key, then plucked the prism from its slot. The stone immediately started to rise back into its place in the spire.

Not one tourist had noticed. They were all too distracted by the view.

Charlie hurried for the stairs that led down. She started to call Dante back... when he emerged onto the balcony. There was a worried look on his face, although the moment he saw Charlie, his eyes narrowed in anger.

"I got it!" Charlie said, more weakly than she'd intended. She held up the safe to show him.

Dante didn't seem to care. Instead he grabbed her arm roughly and dragged her toward the down staircase. "You've really messed up this time," he growled. "And Milana's putting her neck on the line to save us."

Charlie's anxiety immediately came rushing back. "How?"

"I don't know. But I hope it works."

Khatti had taken some time to scope out the cathedral carefully, working on a plan. Milana watched as the agent dispatched Wexler to stay outside, then started inside with

Ford and Theodorakis.

Milana got up from where she had been sitting and fell in with a crowd of tourists who were leaving the cathedral, plotting out her timing.

Wexler headed off along the north side of the cathedral, most likely planning to circle it in search of his targets. Khatti and the others were heading up the stairs. Just as they reached the door, Milana bolted into the traffic on Cannon Street, which ran along the south side of the building, forcing cabs and cars to slam on their brakes. Tires screeched and drivers pounded their horns, creating a great deal of noise.

It grabbed the attention of Khatti, Ford, and Theodorakis, who turned toward the street just in time to see Milana reach the other side.

Milana looked toward them, making sure that they saw her face, and then ducked into an alley.

She had timed things just right. To Khatti, it looked as though Dante and Charlie might have been just ahead of her.

"There they go!" Khatti yelled, and raced down the steps after her. Ford and Theodorakis followed on her heels.

Wexler saw all this from a distance and came running back, but Khatti shouted to him, "Stay here! Just in case!"

Wexler followed her orders and stayed put.

Khatti dashed through the cars on Cannon Street before they could start moving again. Ford and Theodorakis followed her closely.

Ahead of them, Milana ran through the alley at top speed. She'd done her job, luring Khatti and the others away from the cathedral. Now she had to make sure that she didn't get caught herself.

The CIA agents weren't the only ones who had seen Milana.

Kenji Yataro was just arriving at St. Paul's in a cab, along with his grandfather's men, Block and Dryden. Their cab got caught up in the traffic that Milana had caused by running across Cannon Road.

"That's the woman who attacked me!" Dryden declared angrily. He still had a bandage around his head where Milana had clubbed him. "Let's get her!" He leapt from the cab while it was still stopped.

"No," Kenji said sharply. Despite Kenji's youth, Dryden listened to him. After all, the kid was Yoshi Yataro's grandson, so Dryden had learned to respect Kenji's decisions as well.

Kenji got out of the cab along with Block but led the way toward St. Paul's, rather than the direction that Milana had gone. He'd had a better look at her than the CIA had and knew she was alone. "It seems like she's only a decoy," he observed. "Which means the others are probably still close by."

"Where?" Dryden growled, obviously itching for a fight.

Kenji paused in the plaza before the cathedral and stared up toward the top of the dome, taking the building in. "Patience," he said. "I'm sure we'll find them soon enough."

EIGHTEEN

Dante led the way down the stairs as fast as they could go. He was almost running, barreling past people as he came down. Charlie, already aching from the climb, had to push herself to keep up.

Dante held on to the safe and the key Charlie had found. He hadn't said anything to her about this, but she knew he no longer trusted her with important items. After all, he'd trusted her with Newton's prism, and she'd run off with it.

When Charlie asked if he knew the CIA agents coming after them, all Dante said was, "The lead is Varsha Khatti. She's bad news." Then he remained sullenly silent the rest of the way down.

They made a brief stop at the Whispering Gallery so Dante could peer over the railing and see if anyone was waiting to ambush them by the exit from the stairs, then continued on.

As they neared the base of the stairs, Dante said, "There might still be someone here, looking for us. So I need you to just do what I say. No disobeying me this time."

"Got it," Charlie replied, trying her best to sound contrite.

Dante paused at the door that led back into the cathedral. "Walk slowly. Don't draw attention. But if I run, you run."

"Okay."

They exited the stairs and crossed the cathedral. There were plenty of tourists around, but no one made a move for them. Dante strode briskly through the building. Charlie walked by his side.

To her astonishment, the person who had been watching her at the Tower of London was here as well.

Or at least she *thought* it was them. Once again, they were quite far away, lurking in the shadows. But they had the same height and build as the person that Charlie had seen that morning and wore the same long coat and hat as well.

Charlie wanted to point them out to Dante, but she wasn't 100 percent sure she was right. And Dante was already upset at her. So she kept it to herself, wondering if she was just imagining things.

They made it out of the cathedral without any trouble and headed down the stone steps. Dante glanced at Cannon Road, hoping to find a taxi, but traffic was jammed. Milana's sprint across the road had set off a chain reaction that had snarled everything up. Dante knew from experience that when traffic got bad in central London, it was faster to walk than to drive, so he shifted direction, heading north in the direction of the St. Paul's Tube station.

Wexler was coming toward him, walking along the northern side of St. Paul's.

He and Dante saw each other at the same time.

"Run," Dante ordered, then raced across the plaza. There was no longer any point in keeping a low profile. Charlie followed on his heels.

Wexler came after them.

Nearby, Kenji Yataro watched all this. He followed as well, although he didn't sprint after them, the way that Wexler had. Instead, he held back, not wanting to make himself known, keeping an eye on what was happening.

The area of London that surrounded St. Paul's was a spaghetti tangle of roads. Many had started as footpaths or horse tracks a thousand years earlier, and it was rare for one to run more than a few blocks in a straight line. Intersections sometimes had three or four roads crossing at odd angles. It was a terrible place to drive a car.

But it was a good place to escape someone on foot.

Milana raced through the warren of roads, randomly veering left and right at intersections, trying to put as much space between her and the CIA as possible. Now that she had lured Khatti and—hopefully—all the other agents away from St. Paul's, she wanted to lose them.

Unfortunately, Milana wasn't familiar with this area of London. She had no idea where each street would lead, and often they went in directions she didn't want to go. In her haste to escape, it was hard to keep track of exactly where she was. Eventually she found herself in a snarl of narrow alleys. They were filled with small restaurants, some barely big enough to hold more than ten customers, selling food from all over the world: dumplings and street tacos, banh mi and Cubano sandwiches, steaming bowls of pho and curry. The alleys were crammed with people so thickly that Milana could no longer run.

So she slowed to a walk to blend in better, then moved with the crowd. She fought the urge to look behind her, as that would expose her face to anyone following. Instead, she checked the reflection of the crowd in every window she passed.

No one seemed to be tailing her. She had lost them.

Still, she wasn't about to relax. Agent Khatti had an impressive reputation for tracking people.

Milana moved through the alleys until she emerged onto Fleet Street, a major road that paralleled the Thames. An empty cab was coming her way. She flagged it down, leapt inside, and said, "Paddington Station, please."

She wasn't really in need of a train. Paddington was simply in the opposite direction of St. Paul's and close to their burrow.

Now, hidden in the cab, she allowed herself a look backward.

Once again, no one appeared to be following her.

Milana took out her phone and called Dante, hoping he had made it out of St. Paul's safe and sound.

He didn't answer.

Which was bad news.

Where were Dante and Charlie?

Just north of St. Paul's was a plaza called Paternoster Square, even though it was not shaped like a square at all. Instead, it was vaguely circular. A century earlier, it had been home to some of the most distinguished businesses in London. Then, during the Blitz of World War II, German bombers had devastated the area, reducing every building to rubble. The fact that St. Paul's had somehow survived was regarded by many people as a miracle.

Now, Paternoster Square had been rebuilt, with a monument to the people who had perished in the center.

Dante and Charlie raced past it, ducking through the crowd of tourists and businesspeople.

Wexler doggedly followed them.

Dante and Charlie exited the square via yet another narrow alley, paralleling St. Paul's. They crossed a road that led back toward the cathedral, and Charlie glanced that way, just to see if any other CIA agents were coming.

Instead, she saw the mysterious figure yet again. They were silhouetted against the white stone walls of the cathedral. As usual, she couldn't make out their features, but now she was sure it was the same person—and equally sure that person was watching her every move.

"Follow me!" Dante yelled suddenly, grabbing her attention.

Ahead of them was one of several entrances to the St. Paul's Tube station, a set of stairs that descended into the ground. Dante led the way down it.

The London Underground is the seventh largest metropolitan transit system on earth. Its eleven different lines have over 250 miles of track, ninety-three of which pass through tunnels below the city. While some stations could have up to four different connecting lines, St. Paul's served only a single route, the Central Line. And yet, the Central Line was one of the busiest, with over a million riders a day.

It was less crowded now than it would be during rush hour, but there were still dense crowds of people moving in and out. Dante led the way through them while fishing out the Oyster cards he had bought ahead of time, just to be safe.

The Oyster cards were subway passes, and Dante had them loaded with plenty of money. He and Charlie used them to slip through the turnstiles into the Underground, hoping that Wexler would get stalled.

However, Wexler had his own card ready to go.

Khatti had prepped her team well, Dante thought.

Dante hurtled down an escalator, Charlie behind him.

Ahead, they heard the telltale sounds of an incoming subway train: the whoosh of air that it pushed through the tunnel ahead of it, followed by the shriek of its brakes on the rails. Dante didn't care which way it was heading; he just wanted to get on it and leave Wexler behind.

As he reached the bottom of the escalator, a surge of passengers was coming the other way, riders who had been discharged from the train. Dante and Charlie had to force their way through them onto the platform.

The intercom on the train system pinged, warning people that the train was about to

leave.

Dante and Charlie sprang onto it.

The doors began to close, but then popped back open again. At the other end of the train, someone had ignored the warnings and stepped on board, holding up the train's progress.

Wexler raced onto the platform and sprinted for the open doors.

Dante held his breath. If Wexler made it onto the train, there was no way they could get away from him.

But the doors slid shut a moment before Wexler reached them. The agent banged a fist against them angrily, glaring at Dante and Charlie through the glass.

Charlie waved goodbye tauntingly.

The train slid away from the platform and plunged into the tunnel.

Dante sighed with relief, then dug his phone from his pocket.

Milana had called him three times.

He quickly dialed her back.

The moment she answered, Dante said, "Don't worry. We escaped."

"But Milana didn't," said the person at the other end of the line.

Charlie had seen her half brother face plenty of dangerous situations. But she had never seen him look as worried as he did in that moment. He obviously recognized the voice, and his face immediately drained of color.

"Agent Khatti," he said.

NINETEEN

Varsha Khatti was an excellent tracker, and she was adept at blending into crowds as well. She had followed Milana through the streets of London without giving herself away.

And so she had quickly discovered that Milana was not with Dante or Charlie. But she didn't need to catch all of them. She only needed to catch one.

Wexler was on Dante and Charlie's tail, so she coordinated with her other two agents. While Khatti followed Milana through the warren of alleys, she had Ford and Theodorakis race ahead on the surrounding streets to intercept her. When Milana leapt into the cab, Ford was waiting at the next intersection. She simply stepped out into the street, flashed her badge, and the cab dutifully pulled over.

Milana had tried to run, but Theodorakis was waiting for her. And Khatti arrived less than a minute later.

Now all four of them were in the CIA's SUV, crawling through traffic.

Milana sat silently, livid at herself for getting caught.

"Hello, Dante," Khatti said into Milana's phone. "Here's the deal. You and Agent Moon have committed acts of treason against the United States...."

On the subway train, rumbling through the underground tunnels, Dante said, "That's not true."

Khatti ignored this and continued. "However, the United States government is willing to overlook those charges if you play ball with us. Wexler says you're on a train with Charlie Thorne."

"I'm not turning her over."

"If you don't, Agent Moon will go to jail. For several decades, most likely. I want Charlie—and whatever Newton discovered. Wexler said you found it."

"I can't confirm that."

"Really? Then what are you carrying?"

"A locked box that Newton left behind. I haven't opened it yet, so I don't know what's in it. For all I know, it could be empty."

"Then open it," Khatti said. "I can wait."

Dante took the key from his pocket and sat beside Charlie, cradling Newton's safe on his knees.

He was enraged at Charlie for putting him in this situation, but he wasn't about to turn her over. Of course, he didn't want Milana to go to jail, either. The best he could hope for was that somehow he could convince Varsha Khatti to accept whatever Newton had hidden in return for Milana's freedom.

Around them, the subway car was packed. All the seats were taken, and the aisles were

jammed with standing riders. Almost everyone was looking at phones or newspapers, while a nearby family of tourists was trying to make sense of the subway map, figuring out where they were supposed to get off. No one was paying any attention to Dante and Charlie or was the slightest bit aware that a discovery by one of the greatest scientists in history was close at hand.

There were three compartments on the safe, each with its own keyhole. The key Dante held fit in the top one. The safe was exceptionally well crafted. Even though it had been untouched for several centuries, the lock still worked perfectly. The key turned easily, and the top compartment popped open.

There was a single piece of parchment inside. The safe had protected it so well that it appeared to have not aged at all.

Charlie reverently removed it and unfolded it to see what was written on it.

It wasn't what she was hoping for.

It read:

18 July, 1771

By order of the Royal Society, Sir Isaac Newton's discovery has been deemed too powerful and dangerous to leave in this place, lest it fall into the wrong hands. To that end, it has been entrusted to the Honorable Captain James Cook, to take to the farthest ends of the earth, where it shall hopefully remain safe forever.

Seeking A Prize. Now Search Say I

Eventually, A Real Jewel. For a Great Man.

Now, in addition to being angry at Charlie and worried about Milana, Dante also grew frustrated. He muted his phone and said, "What the heck is this all about?"

Charlie frowned, disappointed as well. "In 1768 the British government sent Cook on a trip around the earth. It was partially a scientific expedition, sponsored by the Royal Society. The society even had a team of scientists aboard the ship. If they wanted to get something far away from London—or what the British thought of as the civilized world—that would have been the best way to do it."

"And what's this?" Dante pointed to the final two lines. "It doesn't make any sense."

"Looks like a code of some sort."

Meanwhile, Khatti was still on the phone. "Dante? Talk to me. What's going on?"

Dante reluctantly took the phone off mute. "We don't have Newton's discovery. It seems that the Royal Society gave it to James Cook...."

"The explorer?"

"Yes. He was ordered to take it to the farthest ends of the earth."

There was a pause as Khatti considered that. "Cook traveled all over the world: Tahiti, Alaska, Australia, Indonesia. That discovery could be almost anywhere."

"True," Dante said. "Although the Royal Society left a clue as to where it might be...."

"Forget about it," Khatti said. "It's gone. Just bring me Charlie."

The subway train came to a stop at the next station. The doors slid open. A few

passengers filed off, and then several dozen others stepped aboard.

Dante took a moment, trying to figure out his next move. He told Khatti, "I'm sure Charlie can solve the clues. She's done it before."

"I'm not about to authorize a wild-goose chase to the other side of the planet. Whatever Newton found is not the priority here. Charlie is. Bring her to me."

The subway's public address system asked everyone to step away from the doors, as the train was about to depart the station. The passengers who were standing moved into the center of the train, toward Dante and Charlie.

Kenji Yataro suddenly burst out of the crowd and snatched the parchment from Charlie.

Before Charlie or Dante could react, Kenji shoved a businessman into their laps. The businessman was a big man, and he pinned them down. Kenji darted off the train and onto the subway platform just as the doors slid closed.

Then he flashed a defiant grin at Charlie and Dante as the train continued onward, whisking them away.

"I am so sorry," the businessman said, struggling to his feet. "That guy just shoved me right over!"

"It's okay," Charlie said. "It wasn't your fault."

Dante didn't reply. He was staring in the direction Kenji had gone, stunned by how bad a turn things had taken. There was nothing he could do about the thief. Even if he pulled the cord and stopped the train and ran back down the tunnel to the subway station, Kenji would certainly be long gone by the time he got there. And Dante would probably end up getting arrested.

Khatti was speaking to him on the phone. "Dante? What's going on?"

Dante sighed, then got back on the call. "Someone just stole the clue to where Newton's discovery is hidden."

"Who?" Khatti demanded, exasperated.

"Someone from a rival team searching for Newton's discovery," Dante said. "We encountered him in Cambridge as well."

"And you let him get the jump on you? That's shoddy work."

"I guess I was distracted by you demanding my sister as ransom for Milana," Dante snapped. "That sort of thing tends to divert my attention."

Khatti took a few moments before she spoke again. "Do you think this other person is capable of translating Newton's clues?"

"He's smart, and his organization is well funded," Dante replied. "He's figured out enough to get to Cambridge and now here. So yeah, I think he—or whoever he's working for—could crack the code."

"Do you have any idea what Newton's discovery might be?"

Dante suddenly saw an opportunity. His dark mood lifted ever so slightly. "We have reason to believe it's another equation like Einstein's. Possibly even the same equation."

"How could Newton come up with the same equation that Einstein did three hundred years earlier?"

"Because he was a genius. And if he did figure out that equation, then you know what

could happen if it ends up in the wrong hands.”

“And now you’ve lost the clues to finding it.”

“Not quite. Charlie memorized them.” Dante looked to Charlie quizzically, hoping this was true.

“I did,” Charlie confirmed, loud enough so that Khatti could hear her. “And I think I can decipher them.”

Khatti fell silent again, weighing her options. Pandora could allow almost anyone to create a nuclear bomb; she couldn’t let it fall into the wrong hands. Finally, she said, “New plan. If Newton found Pandora, then we have to get to it first.”

“We?” Dante repeated, concerned.

“You thought I’d let you do this without a babysitter? I’ll accompany you and Charlie, while my team takes Agent Moon back to the States. She’ll remain in custody with the CIA at Langley until both Newton’s discovery and Charlie are delivered there. If you try anything funny, Moon goes to prison. Are we agreed?”

“Do I have a choice?”

“No.”

“Then I guess we’re agreed.”

Khatti gave Dante the address of a hotel. “I’ll expect you there within half an hour. If you’re not...”

“Milana goes to jail. I’ve got it.”

“Good. See you soon.” Khatti hung up.

“That was awfully sneaky of you,” Charlie said proudly. “Letting Khatti think Pandora was at stake. Way to buy us some time.”

Dante gave her a hard stare, letting her know he was still angry at her. “You’d better be able to crack that clue.”

“Oh, that won’t be a problem,” Charlie replied. “I’ve already done it.”

Dante gaped at her in surprise. “What’s it say?”

“That we’re going to Australia.”

TWENTY

The first clue is the date on the letter,” Charlie said. “Do you remember what that was?”

She and Dante had gotten off their subway train at the next stop, Holborn, and were riding the long escalators up toward the surface.

“No,” Dante said gruffly. “Not everyone has a photographic memory like you.”

“It was July 18, 1771. Which was after James Cook *returned* from his first trip around the world. He left in the summer of 1768 and got back nearly three years later. If the Royal Society had simply wanted Cook to toss Newton’s discovery into the sea, they could have left a letter in 1768 saying that was the plan, but leaving the letter in July of 1771 indicates that...”

“... they knew where Cook had hidden Newton’s discovery.”

“Exactly. So it makes sense that those weird sentences at the end of the letter would be a clue to its location.” Charlie and Dante reached the top of the escalator and joined the flow of riders exiting the station. “Now, there’s a simple way to give the location of every spot on earth: latitude and longitude. The longitude lines go from north to south, with the prime meridian really close to where we are right now.”

“Yeah.” Dante shoved through the turnstile to exit the subway. “It goes straight through the Royal Observatory in Greenwich.”

Charlie came through the turnstile behind him, and they passed through a small underground mall. “To calculate longitude, the earth is divided into three hundred and sixty degrees, with one hundred eighty degrees to the east and west of the prime meridian. Then there’s also the lines of latitude, which circle the earth from east to west. The equator circles the middle of the earth, and there’s ninety degrees north and south, to the poles.”

“I know all this,” Dante snapped. “I’m a sailor. I’ve been using latitude and longitude since before you were born.”

“Okay, smarty-pants. How do you denote them?”

“There are three numbers for each: the degree of latitude or longitude, then the minutes, and then the seconds, along with a delineation for north, south, east, or west. Since we’re so close to the prime meridian, our longitude is almost exactly zero degrees. And London’s about fifty-one degrees north of the equator. I can’t work out the minutes and seconds without some serious instruments, though. That’s too exact.”

Charlie checked an app on her phone as they emerged from the underground mall onto the streets. “Very good. We’re fifty-one degrees, fifty-two minutes, and fourteen seconds north and zero degrees, twelve minutes, and one second west.”

“What’s your point?” Dante considered the traffic, which was bumper-to-bumper.

The street was jammed with cars, all honking angrily. “C’mon. It’s faster to walk to the hotel.” He turned south, down a side street.

Charlie dropped in beside him. “My point is simple: That note gave us the exact coordinates to where Newton’s discovery was hidden.”

Dante considered that, then suddenly understood. “Those last sentences weren’t about the words at all.”

“Nope. It’s about the *length* of the words. Except for the first word in each line, which is giving us the compass direction: ‘Seeking A Prize. Now Search Say I. Eventually, A Real Jewel. For a Great Man.’ The *S* in ‘Seeking’ means south. The *E* in ‘Eventually’ means east. And the rest of it gives us coordinates. Fifteen degrees, thirty-six minutes, and thirty-one seconds south. One hundred forty-five degrees, thirty-one minutes, and fifty-three seconds east.” Charlie typed them into her phone and triumphantly displayed the result. “That’s a place called Rosser Reef, which is right off the coast of Cooktown, Australia. Which is named Cooktown because...”

“James Cook was stranded there for a few months after damaging his ship on the reef,” Dante said curtly. “I know about that.”

Charlie looked to her brother expectantly. “You’re not impressed that I figured it out so fast?”

“We’re both well aware that you’re brilliant, Charlie. The problem is that you’re also reckless and impetuous.”

“Which can be an asset,” Charlie insisted. “Like in the subway just now, when I used Kenji to buy us some time.”

Dante turned to her, mouth agape. “You don’t mean...”

“Yeah. I let him steal the clue from us,” Charlie said proudly. “Kenji’s the one who delayed the train from leaving the first station. I saw him jumping on.”

“Why would you let him have the clue?” Dante was so angry, he practically shouted the words.

“Two reasons. First, Khatti wanted you to turn me over to her right then. So I had to change the stakes. Second, the clue isn’t that important.”

“It tells where Newton’s discovery is hidden! And it barely took you a minute to crack it. So it probably won’t take Kenji—or whoever he’s working for—long to crack it either.”

“True. But we still have *that*.” Charlie proudly pointed to the safe in Dante’s hands.

“We’ve already used this,” Dante said dismissively.

“Not completely. There are still two more keyholes in it. And look at the inscription. See who built it.”

Dante turned the metal box over in his hands. Etched on the base was the name J. HARRISON.

“John Harrison was one of the—” Charlie started to explain.

“I know who he was,” Dante growled. “And it doesn’t change the fact that what you did was rash and foolish.”

Charlie grew angry in return. “I never do *anything* foolish.”

“What would you call disobeying me to go up to the top of St. Paul’s? Milana told you

it wasn't safe to go, but you disobeyed her—and now she's in serious trouble, thanks to you."

"This is just as much your fault as it is mine."

Dante gave her an incredulous look. "How on earth do you figure that?"

"Because *you* dragged me into all this!" They were now heading through Covent Garden, an area filled with shops, theaters, and cafés—and therefore filled with tourists as well. Despite the crowds, Charlie couldn't keep her feelings in any longer. "I'm thirteen, Dante! I haven't had years of training like you and Milana—and you didn't give me any! You just threw me right into a life-threatening situation! What did you expect was going to happen when you brought me aboard? That I'd magically turn into a perfect agent just like you?"

Dante glanced nervously at all the people around them. "Lower your voice," he hissed. "Or you're going to cause us even more trouble."

Charlie glared at him. "Did you ever even think about how much trouble you've caused *me*? I was perfectly happy, minding my own business, when you forced me to join your mission! And look what's happened! You ruined my life! I'm a fugitive! I'm constantly in danger! I can never see my friends again! My own government is probably going to torture me to get Pandora!"

"And now they've got leverage over us, thanks to your behavior." Dante grabbed Charlie's arm and hustled her onto a narrow street away from the crowds. "Milana could end up in jail for the rest of her life. I love her, Charlie! And if it comes to making a decision between you and her..." Dante didn't finish the sentence, as though he already regretted beginning it, but he'd said enough. Charlie understood what he'd been thinking.

"You'd trade me to save her," she said. "Your own sister."

"No," Dante said. "But you're going to help me figure out a way to save her. And once that's done... *we're* done. This partnership is over. You can go back to your easy, carefree life without me."

Charlie just stared at him, shocked by what he'd said.

"That's what you want, isn't it?" Dante asked. "A life without me in it?"

"Yes," Charlie said petulantly.

"Great. Then we'll figure out how to save Milana and go our separate ways after we track down whatever Newton found. This is our final mission together."

"Fine with me," Charlie said, although as she spoke, she realized that wasn't the truth at all.

Dante didn't respond. He was staring at someone on the sidewalk ahead of them.

They had arrived at the hotel. Agent Khatti stood in front of it, watching them approach.

"Hello, Varsha," Dante said, at once respectful and wary.

"Hello." The tone of Khatti's voice indicated she was very disappointed with Dante. She then looked to Charlie and made no attempt to seem kind or welcoming. "You must be the infamous Charlie Thorne."

Charlie simply nodded and lowered her eyes.

“Where’s Milana?” Dante glanced up at the hotel.

“Not here,” Khatti replied. “You don’t honestly think I’d bring you to the place where I was holding her?”

“Where is she?” Dante repeated, more demanding now.

“In a safe place. Two members of my team will escort her back to the States once we can arrange transportation, while Agent Wexler and I remain with you. Have you figured out where we’re going next?”

“Yes,” Dante replied. “The Great Barrier Reef near Cooktown, Australia.”

“Actually, that’s not quite right,” Charlie said.

Dante wheeled on her, looking like he was at the end of his patience. “You just told me that’s where the discovery is hidden!”

“That’s right,” Charlie agreed. “However, we need to make a quick stop on the way.”

TWENTY-ONE

Kensington Palace Gardens, London

Kenji Yataro had always wanted to please his grandfather.

It wasn't easy. Yoshi Yataro was a prickly, difficult man. He rarely dispensed praise to anyone—to either the thousands of people who worked for him or to his family. But that was why the rare occasions when he *did* praise someone were so special.

Kenji was unusually intelligent. He could have easily cruised through school, attended any university he wanted, and procured a good job at an honorable company. But to earn his grandfather's favor, he had pushed himself. He had been valedictorian at the finest academies in Japan, mastered both karate and jujitsu before he was ten, placed in several international chess tournaments, and also excelled in skiing, tennis, and marksmanship. He could scuba dive, fly a plane, and build a robot. Even at the relatively young age of nineteen, he was smarter, more athletic, and more capable than most people.

And yet, that was still rarely good enough for Yoshi Yataro.

It had been the greatest honor of Kenji's life when his grandfather had brought him on to help with his top secret project. Yoshi hadn't asked; he had merely informed Kenji that he would be taking some time off from his university studies to join him. (The university had been completely understanding, of course; everyone there wanted to please Yoshi Yataro too.) Kenji had two older siblings, as well as nine first cousins, all of whom had excelled in school, many of whom already worked for the family business—and yet Kenji had been selected over all of them. Kenji wondered if it was an indication that he might someday be the one chosen to run the business as well.

At first, everything about the project had been thrilling: the preparations, the training, traveling on the private jet. Even the secrecy that surrounded the mission had created an air of excitement.

But ever since Cambridge—and the arrival of Charlie Thorne—things had taken a bad turn. Yoshi had been extremely disappointed with Kenji's failure at the Wren Library. It had taken a lot of money and favors to recover the trail to Newton's discovery. And now, as far as Yoshi was concerned, Kenji had failed again.

Kenji had returned to his grandfather with the next clue, expecting to be praised. He thought he had performed well. He had cleverly followed Charlie and her handler from St. Paul's Cathedral to the subway train without being noticed. He had watched unobserved as they opened the safe, then deftly swiped the letter that had been hidden inside. It had been frustrating to discover that the letter did not reveal Newton's discovery, but Kenji had then cleverly deciphered the clue to figure out where to go next.

Certainly, that performance was worthy of approval.

Instead, Yoshi was livid.

They were at his mansion in Kensington Palace Gardens. Even in a city famed for expensive real estate, Kensington Palace Gardens was regarded as the most exclusive street in London. It ran along the western edge of Hyde Park and was technically still part of the Crown Estate, the lands owned by the British royalty. The average price of a mansion there was over thirty-five million pounds, a good fifteen million higher than the next priciest street in the city. Half of the mansions were owned by countries: They were the embassies for Russia, Israel, and France, among others. But some of the world's wealthiest people owned the others, for which reason the street was often referred to as Billionaire's Row.

Yoshi's mansion was not the biggest on the exclusive, tree-lined street, but it was still enormous, especially considering that Yoshi used it less than two weeks a year. There were seventy-two rooms, some of which Kenji suspected no one had entered since his grandfather had bought the place.

They were in Yoshi's office, a grand room with a wall of windows that had a commanding view of Hyde Park. The desk was an imposing mass of lacquered oak that was rumored to have been used by King George III. However, Yoshi was too upset to stay seated. He was pacing furiously around the room.

"I wanted Newton's discovery, not this useless piece of paper!" the old man raged, shaking the message Kenji had stolen for him. "You can't do anything right!"

"It is not my fault that the Royal Society moved the discovery," Kenji protested meekly, his head bowed in shame. "And that paper is *not* useless. It tells where we should go next: Rosser Reef in Australia."

"And where are we to look when we get there?" Yoshi demanded.

Kenji realized, to his dismay, that he had no answer. "I don't know, Grandfather. Perhaps, if I knew what we were looking for, I would be able to figure it out."

"Perhaps, if you had taken everything the Royal Society had left behind, instead of just this paper, we would already know what to do next."

Kenji warily lifted his head to give his grandfather a confused look. "I got a good look at the safe. There wasn't anything inside it besides that paper."

Yoshi glared at him as though he were an imbecile. "And what about the safe itself?"

Kenji winced. "I assumed it was only to hold the treasure."

"You *assumed*," Yoshi repeated mockingly. "But you did not *think*. Anything someone goes through so much trouble to hide must be worth something. And you foolishly left it in the hands of our rivals."

"I'll get it back," Kenji insisted.

"How?"

"Our rivals are clever. I'm sure they will figure out the clue as well. That means they are also headed for Rosser Reef. When they arrive, we can be waiting for them."

Yoshi didn't say anything for a while. Kenji took this as a good sign. His grandfather was considering his plan, rather than dismissing it.

There was a knock at the office door.

“Yes?” Yoshi barked.

The door opened, and one of Yoshi’s many aides entered. “The bags are packed and the car is ready to take you to the airport.”

“It’s about time.” Yoshi started for the door, then glanced back at Kenji, who hadn’t moved, unsure what he was expected to do. “Why aren’t you following? We are leaving.”

Kenji nodded and hurried after his grandfather. “Where are we going?”

“Where else? To follow in the footsteps of Captain Cook and recover what he hid.”

They exited the office onto a landing where a grand staircase swept downward into the marble foyer of the mansion. Several aides were carting Yoshi’s luggage out the door.

“So you are taking my advice?” Kenji asked, trying to temper his excitement. “We are headed to Rosser Reef?”

“Eventually,” Yoshi replied. “But there’s something important we need to get first.”

PART THREE

THE REEF

Ambition leads me not only farther than any other man has been before me, but
as far as I think it possible for man to go.

—JAMES COOK

TWENTY-TWO

Somewhere in the air over Germany

Charlie had already been on several jets in the CIA's fleet, but the one she was aboard now was the newest and largest. There was room for twenty people, although at the moment, there were only six aboard: two pilots, Agents Khatti and Wexler, Dante, and Charlie herself. In the rear, there was a small boardroom, with comfortable seats arranged around a table, as well as a fully stocked kitchenette.

Khatti, Wexler, Dante, and Charlie were seated at the table. The safe they had recovered from St. Paul's Cathedral sat in the center of it. Charlie and Dante weren't handcuffed or bound in any way, although the CIA had locked tracking bracelets on each of their wrists. Charlie had made herself a turkey and avocado sandwich, along with chips and a soda. Dante had made himself ham, tuna, salami, and American cheese. Normally, Charlie would have mocked him for his terrible taste in food, but she kept silent, not wanting to do anything more to anger him. As it was, Dante had barely said a word to her since their argument in Covent Garden.

Charlie was miserable, wondering if Dante had been telling the truth about wanting to go their separate ways after they were done. She was so lost in her thoughts, she didn't even realize that Khatti had asked her a question. Not until Khatti got frustrated and snapped at her. "Charlie!"

Charlie looked to her. "What?"

"I asked you why you don't want to go directly to Rosser Reef."

Charlie chewed her sandwich thoughtfully. Then she asked, "How much do you know about Captain James Cook?"

"A decent amount," Khatti replied. "He was one of the greatest navigators in British history. He sailed around the earth three times..."

"And he discovered Australia," Wexler added.

"I think all the people who were already living in Australia would disagree with that," Charlie said. "Cook was merely the first European to *claim* Australia. The Royal Navy had given him orders to declare ownership of new lands for England to expand the empire. Although Cook didn't even know about that when he first set sail. Those orders were sealed in an envelope for him. His original task was far more scientific. In fact, it was really an extension of Newton's work: figuring out the size of the solar system."

"How's that?" Khatti asked, intrigued.

Charlie launched into her explanation, happy to have a distraction from thinking about Dante and Milana. "Well, Newton had worked out the motion of the planets, but

he couldn't accurately calculate how big they were. No one could, because they didn't have the data to do it. All people could do was make educated guesses, but those were really far off. For much of human history, people thought the sun was about twenty times closer to the earth than it actually is. However, the scientific community knew how to get the data they needed: triangulation."

"Triangulation?" Wexler repeated.

Charlie said, "If two people on opposite sides of the earth could observe the exact same planet at the exact same time, the stars behind it would appear slightly different. That information could then be used to calculate the angle of difference and, using the diameter of the earth, you could then figure out how far away the planet was."

"Basic Euclidean geometry," Khatti noted.

"Yes. The math was the easy part," Charlie said. "Getting the measurements was an ordeal. Basically, a rare celestial event was needed to get the timing right, so that everyone could guarantee they were looking at the same place at the same time. Thanks to Newton's calculations of planetary motion, the scientific community in the late 1700s knew that just such a rare celestial event was coming: Venus was going to cross the sun. The scientists could work out the exact date and time it would happen years in advance. But then they had to get people to the other side of the world to observe it—and hope it wasn't a cloudy day. That's where Cook came in."

Charlie took a bite of her sandwich and continued. "The Royal Society of London, the same organization that Newton had been president of a couple decades earlier, mounted an expedition to Tahiti. Cook was selected as captain, and he brought along a whole delegation of scientists led by a young rich guy named Joseph Banks, who would eventually become president of the Royal Society himself. It appears that a few members of the society must have known about Newton's discovery and maybe even been assigned to protect it. Since they were sending Cook off to the far side of the world to watch the transit of Venus, they asked him to take Newton's discovery with him."

"But why not leave it at St. Paul's?" Khatti inquired.

Charlie shrugged. "I guess the society felt the hiding place wasn't as safe as it used to be. Or maybe, Newton had always wanted his discovery to be shipped off to the ends of the earth, but there had never been a way to do it until then."

Khatti nodded appreciatively. Wexler just stared at Charlie, impressed. "How do you know all this stuff?" he asked.

"I just spent eight weeks on a sailboat with nothing to do but read," Charlie explained. "Once I started learning about Newton, things led to the transit of Venus. Cook wasn't the only one sent out to try to observe it. Other countries sent scientists to places like Siberia, Madagascar, South Africa, and India, and just about every one of them had a completely miserable couple of years, only to have the weather be crummy on Transit Day. Even Cook wasn't entirely successful. He had good weather, but until that day, no one knew that Venus had a really thick atmosphere. That blurred its edges as it crossed the sun, which threw off Cook's measurements. But still, he did better than just about anyone else, thanks in a large part to the guy who built *that*." Charlie pointed at the safe that sat in the center of the table.

Khatti looked at it, intrigued. "Who was that?"

"According to the inscription, John Harrison, who was one of the greatest craftsmen of his time. He's the guy who made it possible to work out longitude."

"How?" asked Wexler.

"By building the best clock ever made."

Khatti and Wexler shared a confused look, then turned back to Charlie. "I think we need some more information," Khatti said.

Now Dante spoke up. As a sailor, he was well versed in the story of John Harrison. "Back in the early days of ocean exploration, figuring out longitude was a major challenge. Latitude was much easier: If you can see where the stars and the sun are relative to the horizon, then you can easily work out how far north or south you are. True, the earth tilts as it shifts between summer and winter, but it's not hard to account for that. Humans have been able to accurately calculate latitude for thousands of years. But longitude is a whole different story. It's far more difficult to work out because the earth rotates, which means the positions of the stars and the sun are constantly changing. And when you don't know your longitude, bad things can happen. Countless ships were lost over the years. For instance, in the early 1700s, the British navy suffered a massive tragedy when four ships ran aground in the middle of the night just off England. They had miscalculated their longitude and thought they were two thousand miles to the west, out in the middle of the ocean. More than a thousand men died in that single incident."

"And the solution to all this was a clock?" Wexler asked.

"Yes," Dante said. "But not just any clock. You see, the way to determine your longitude involves knowing exactly what time it is. Even though the stars move across the sky, they do it at a fixed rate: fifteen degrees per hour. So if you know the correct time, you can work out where you are. However, back in the 1700s, clocks used pendulums, and while pendulums work great on land, they don't work well on ships, which rock back and forth and throw off the mechanics. Even the best clocks lost ten to fifteen minutes a day at sea, which added up to several hours after a week. That meant that navigators could end up thinking they were hundreds of miles away from where they really were."

"Which led to some *really* inaccurate mapmaking," Charlie added. "Ferdinand Magellan was the first man to sail around the world, and he mistakenly put the Philippines fifty-three degrees away from where they really were, which was like saying that New York City is off the coast of Portugal."

"So someone had to build a clock that wouldn't be affected by the motion of the ships," Dante went on, "which was a very tall order. A lot of people thought it couldn't be done. But it was important to try, so many nations offered cash prizes to whoever could solve the problem. The British Board of Longitude offered the biggest reward: twenty thousand pounds. Which is equivalent to millions of dollars today."

"And this John Harrison figured it out?" Khatti said.

"Eventually," Dante replied. "He didn't finish his clock until the 1760s, but he did an exceptional job. It was tested on a ship that sailed to Jamaica and only lost five seconds over eighty days, which is actually better than most modern watches can do."

"And the British government totally stiffed him on the prize money," Charlie

announced.

“That’s true,” Dante agreed. “Even though the British navy started using his timepieces, it took Harrison years of lobbying to receive his prize—and he never got all of it. But one of his great champions was Cook, who took Harrison’s clocks with him on each of his voyages. Not only did those keep him and his crew safe, but it allowed him to make incredibly precise maps. For example, his maps of New Zealand were so accurate that the British navy continued using them into the 1980s.”

Khatti looked back at Harrison’s metal box. “So your presumption is that, if the Royal Society asked John Harrison to build this, then it must be more than a simple safe.”

“Bingo.” Charlie crammed a handful of chips into her mouth. “When we found Einstein’s equation, it was built into a special box with a vial of pure cesium inside. If you didn’t enter the right code—or tried to force the box open—the vial would break and the cesium would ignite, destroying the paper with the equation on it. That way, Einstein could ensure that only someone he sent could retrieve the equation. I’m betting that Harrison rigged up something similar here.”

Khatti gingerly picked up the safe and inspected it carefully. “You think something else is locked in these other compartments?”

“Yes,” Charlie said. “And there’s no way to open them without the right key.”

“And where would this key be?” Wexler asked.

Charlie shrugged again. “Maybe it’s with the rest of the discovery in Rosser Reef.”

“Which brings us back to where we started,” Khatti said. “Why aren’t we going directly there?”

“Because we need a little more direction as to where we need to look,” Charlie answered.

“The clue the Royal Society left us wasn’t enough?” Wexler questioned. “It gave awfully precise latitude and longitude.”

“That’s true,” Charlie admitted. “But that still only points us to the reef, which according to my research is several football fields long. Plus, even Captain James Cook, armed with John Harrison’s clock, might not have been able to perfectly pinpoint his latitude and longitude. This was done way before satellite-based global positioning systems. If Cook really wanted to show the exact location where he’d left something, he’d have put it on a map.”

Khatti’s eyes suddenly lit up with understanding. “And you know where Cook’s maps of Rosser Reef are?”

“Yes,” Charlie said proudly. “They’re at the Australian National Maritime Museum—in Sydney, Australia.”

TWENTY-THREE

Duxford Airfield, Great Britain

As the CIA Range Rover approached the security gates of Duxford, Milana Moon slouched in the back seat, pretending to be asleep.

People tended to let their guard down when they thought you were sleeping, and given that they had left London at five in the morning, it made sense that Milana would be sacked out.

Her wrists were cinched with zip ties, and a chain from them was linked to a bolt on the floor so she couldn't leap from the car. The CIA had laid a jacket over the chain, not wanting to draw attention. If the British guards on site knew the Agency was flying a prisoner out of the country, they'd immediately notify MI6.

That was also the reason for the very early departure time. Varsha Khatti had taken the CIA's jet to pursue Newton's discovery, which left Ford and Theodorakis without a way back home. They could have hopped a commercial flight, but again, bringing Milana aboard in handcuffs would have drawn attention—and Arthur Zell had been insistent that he wanted her under lock and key at all times. He had personally authorized the dispatch of a second jet, but Duxford didn't operate in the middle of the night except for dire emergencies, and Zell didn't want to declare one of those. So the jet was landing at the first opportunity: six a.m. on the nose.

Ford and Theodorakis had taken turns keeping watch over Milana in the safe house that night, making sure she didn't try to escape, but Milana had just slept. She had been exhausted from her long day, and besides, escaping the safe house was next to impossible. She figured her best opportunity for a getaway would present itself later, although she didn't know when.

Which was why she was only pretending to be asleep at the moment.

Neither Ford nor Theodorakis had spoken to her much since her capture. The story at the Agency was that Milana had defected for personal profit, and agents who did that were generally despised by the ones who remained honest and true. She was a traitor to her country. Milana hadn't bothered trying to convince them that she had been framed by her own agency. Plenty of rogue agents had made similar arguments over the years; Milana's was the rare case in which it was actually true, but that didn't mean anyone would believe her.

Ford and Theodorakis hadn't spoken much to each other on the drive to Duxford either. It was early, they were tired, and there was a twenty-year gap in their ages; Except for having the same job, they had nothing in common. They couldn't even agree on

music, so they listened to the news.

It wasn't until they arrived at the airfield that anything of interest was said.

They passed through the guard gate without incident. The guard posted there had just come on duty. It was still dark, and would be for another half hour. Ford and Theodorakis showed their badges, then Milana's old badge as well. The guard on duty shined his flashlight on Milana's face, making sure that she was the same person on the ID, then waved them through. Milana continued pretending to sleep.

Theodorakis parked the SUV on the edge of the tarmac, and they watched in silence as the CIA jet came in for a landing, then taxied over to them. Milana kept her eyes closed. She heard the whine of the engines die as the plane was shut down. Theodorakis and Ford stayed in the car with the heater going; it was cold out on the pre-dawn runway.

After a few minutes, the pilots exited the jet and approached the SUV. Milana heard Theodorakis lower his window.

"We're gonna hit the head, then get some food and coffee," one pilot said.

"This is supposed to be a quick turnaround." Theodorakis sounded annoyed.

"Change of plans."

Milana figured the pilot must have handed Theodorakis a sealed dossier, because the next thing she heard was the sound of an envelope being opened, followed by the crinkle of paper. Then Theodorakis groaned, annoyed.

"What does it say?" Ford asked.

Theodorakis passed the orders over, and a few moments later, Ford groaned as well. "Do you think Khatti knows about this?"

"I doubt it."

"Should we tell her?"

The SUV shifted. Milana knew that was Theodorakis turning his bulky body around in the front seat to see if she was still sleeping. Then he said, "No."

"But..."

"These orders are from the top. We don't question them. We don't make waves. We just do what they say." There was a pause as Theodorakis thought for a moment. Then he said, "We ought to get some food too. This is gonna be a long flight, and I'll bet there's nothing to eat on the plane."

"Great," Ford muttered, annoyed.

"You can go," Theodorakis said. "Get me an egg sandwich or something. I'll keep an eye on the traitor."

Ford got out and headed across the tarmac.

Milana continued to feign sleep, although under her calm exterior, she was worried. Zell had changed the plans without telling Khatti. Milana wasn't going to CIA headquarters anymore. Instead, the agents were taking her somewhere farther than they'd expected.

So what were they going to do with her?

TWENTY-FOUR

Sydney, Australia

The continent of Australia is the world's biggest island, by far. Nearly three million square miles, it is approximately the size of the lower forty-eight United States.

And yet, until relatively recently, most of humanity was unaware that it existed.

The first settlers, the Aboriginal people, appear to have arrived on the continent at least 50,000 years ago, although no one knows how they got there. After that, they had virtually no contact with the rest of humankind. The Australians were isolated for thousands of generations. Their culture is regarded as the longest surviving on earth.

Dutch explorers first came to Australia in the 1600s but didn't find much they considered valuable. So they ignored the island in favor of others.

Then, in April 1770, James Cook arrived. By that time, he had already been at sea for nearly two years and sailed over twenty thousand miles. He had observed the transit of Venus in Tahiti and spent six months mapping the coasts of New Zealand. Much of his crew wanted to head home as quickly as possible, but Cook had his orders from the British government to explore and claim new lands for Britain. He and his crew encountered violent storms on the way from New Zealand, and even when they spotted the Australian coast, rough surf and harsh winds prevented them from landing for ten days.

When they finally made it to land, they discovered a safe harbor with plenty of timber to repair their ship and abundant fish to feed everyone. It was paradise. In a single day, the crew of the *Endeavour* hauled aboard over half a ton of stingrays. Joseph Banks and the other naturalists from the Royal Society found so many previously undiscovered plant species that they couldn't collect them all. The beautiful spot was christened Botany Bay (although Cook had suggested Stingray Harbor). Cook and his men were so charmed by the place that when they headed north to explore the coast nine days later and spotted the entrance to Sydney Harbor, they didn't even bother to sail into it, figuring it wouldn't be nearly as nice as Botany Bay.

What Cook and his men couldn't possibly have known was that they had arrived in Botany Bay after an unusually wet summer, leading to one of the most misguided mass migrations in human history.

Only a few years after Cook's return, Britain's Parliament began considering sites for a new place to ship prisoners, seeing as the last place they had chosen to do this, the American colonies, had revolted and formed their own independent country. Britain wanted to send the prisoners someplace far away, from which they couldn't escape but

could sustain themselves without aid from their mother country. The reports from the *Endeavour* made Botany Bay sound like the perfect place; Joseph Banks had noted it had a gentle climate that could support a great number of people, while Cook had observed that the soil was rich and suitable for agriculture.

So in 1787, the British dispatched eleven ships loaded with convicts to Botany Bay. After eight months at sea, they arrived to find an extremely different place than Cook had encountered. Australia is, in fact, the driest inhabited continent on earth. Nearly 20 percent of it is desert. The new British fleet arrived in the midst of Australia's summer. The verdant landscape Cook had seen was now barren and parched, while Botany Bay was so dry that it was too shallow to serve as a port.

The fleet had no choice but to head north to Sydney Harbor, which they found much deeper and more extensive—although not much better for agriculture. However, Britain was already committed to its resettlement plan. Ultimately, the English would send another 160,000 prisoners to Australia, creating the largest jail on earth.

The settlement grew over time, and eventually, Australia stopped being a penal colony and became the only country that was also a continent. Sydney is now a city of over five million people, which is about a fifth of Australia's population. The harbor that Cook blithely dismissed is often regarded as one of the most beautiful in the world, and the city's most famous landmarks either line its banks—such as the Sydney Opera House, the botanic gardens, and the Taronga Zoo—or, in the case of the Harbor Bridge, span the water entirely.

Sadly, the people who were already living in Australia when the British arrived suffered greatly. It is estimated that there were anywhere from 300,000 to a million indigenous people living in Australia in 1788; two centuries later, there were only a third as many. Australia's first constitution didn't even recognize them as citizens; they were denied the right to vote and many other rights. Massacres of the indigenous people continued on the frontier until 1928, and in the following decades, state and church officials routinely took light-skinned indigenous children from their families and placed them in orphanages, or with childless white families, in an attempt to assimilate them and "breed out black blood." The policy didn't end until the 1970s.

Attitudes have changed since then. Attempts have been made to protect indigenous cultures and to make amends for the atrocities committed against them. And while most Australians recognize that Cook wasn't personally responsible for the British colonization, he still remains a symbol of it. For much of the country's history, he had been lionized; in modern times, he is often scorned.

The National Maritime Museum, like many other institutions, tries to thread the line between idolization and criticism. After all, you can't really discuss Australia's maritime history *without* bringing up Cook. To that end, the museum, which is situated along a finger of Sydney Harbor in the midst of downtown, has a full-scale replica of Cook's ship, the *Endeavour*, docked outside, as well as an extensive collection of the maps he drew of the Australian coast.

Charlie, Dante, Khatti, and Wexler took a cab directly there from the airport, although they had to walk the last block down a quay that ran along the harbor. They had flown

through the night from London, with only a brief refueling stop in New Delhi, India. The trip was nearly eleven thousand miles long and had taken almost a day. It had been a long time to be cooped up inside a small airplane, although once Charlie laid eyes on the replica of the *Endeavour*, she realized that her trip had been staggeringly easy compared to the one Cook and his men had endured. First of all, the jet had been significantly faster; even at full sail, it would have taken the *Endeavour* half a year to return from London to Sydney—although it actually had taken the ship more than a year to get home. Then, the food was better; the crew of the *Endeavour* had subsisted mostly on salt pork, oatmeal, and biscuits so vermin-infested that Joseph Banks had reported seeing thousands of insects shaken out of a single basket. The jet also had a bathroom, while the *Endeavour* did not. Instead, the ship had planks with holes in the bow, which sailors would squat over while hanging on for dear life; on Cook's second voyage, he had lost a crew member when the poor man slipped while doing his business and drowned.

Finally, even though the *Endeavour* was significantly bigger than the jet, it still turned out to be much smaller than Charlie had expected. Rather than being a grand sailing ship, specifically commissioned for its important mission, it was merely a refurbished coal transport. It was squat and stubby, less than a hundred feet long and only twenty-nine feet wide. To Charlie, it looked like a floating coffin.

Dante must have been thinking the same thing. He paused on the quay near the replica of the *Endeavour* and asked, "Can you imagine what it would have been like to spend three years aboard that tub?"

"Weren't you just at sea for a couple of weeks?" Wexler asked.

"That was very different," Dante noted. "Our sailboat might have been a lot smaller than the *Endeavour*, but there were only three of us aboard. There were ninety-four men and boys on the *Endeavour*. Most of them shared hammocks, and the clearance in the lower decks was only four and a half feet, so they had to stoop to walk around." He then pointed to the tops of the masts, which soared over a hundred and thirty feet in the air. "Plus, crewmen often had to spend an entire watch up there. There were no safety harnesses. The sailors just had to hold on tight, which was hard enough on calm days—and nearly impossible in a storm. And if the ship wrecked, there weren't any lifeboats, either. Cook lost forty percent of his crew on his first trip around the world, and that was better than average."

Wexler gaped in surprise. "Forty percent?"

"There were a lot of ways to die at sea," Dante observed. "Falling overboard, exposure to the elements, skirmishes with natives... Cook once lost four men in a single storm. Although he actually lost the most men to disease, particularly dysentery. A sailor's life had almost no value at all. Besides Cook and a few other people, we don't know the names of anyone who was on the crew of the *Endeavour*. No one ever bothered to write their names down."

"Even the captains themselves were in danger," Charlie added. "Everyone thinks of Ferdinand Magellan as the first sailor to navigate all the way around the earth, but he actually died halfway through the voyage during a battle in the Philippines. His expedition started with five ships and two hundred seventy men—but only eighteen men

made it back alive.”

“Let’s focus on making *our* mission a success,” Khatti insisted. “We have work to do.” She turned away from the *Endeavour* and headed toward the entrance of the maritime museum.

Wexler and Dante followed her, but Charlie remained where she was, staring at the replica of the *Endeavour*. Dante’s description of life on board had triggered something in her mind, a vague idea that seemed like it might be important, although she wasn’t quite sure why. She struggled to bring it into focus....

“Charlie!” Agent Khatti snapped. “Let’s go!”

The words derailed Charlie’s train of thought, leaving her with the sensation you got when you were about to say something but then forgot what it was. Frustrated, she turned toward the museum.

The building was a white, modern structure with a series of curved roofs, similar in design to the famous Sydney Opera House, the curves representing waves—or perhaps sails.

Ahead of Khatti, someone burst through the museum’s doors, running full tilt, clutching a piece of paper in his hand.

The person had a ski mask pulled down over his face, but Charlie instantly realized who it was, due to the fluid, athletic way he ran—and the fact that he was here at the museum as well.

Kenji Yataro.

TWENTY-FIVE

Dante immediately recognized Kenji too. Without a moment's hesitation, he raced after him.

Charlie followed suit.

Khatti and Wexler fell in behind them. Neither had encountered Kenji before, but both got the idea that the paper in his hand was the very one they had come to get.

The burglar alarms at the museum began to wail. Four security guards poured out of the building, in pursuit of Kenji as well.

The guards were all out of shape, used to standing around the exhibits for hours on end, rather than serious exertion. All of them were panting heavily already. Kenji was able to outrun them easily—but the team from the CIA was a different story. The agents and Charlie stayed right behind him as he sprinted down the quay along the harbor.

However, Kenji had an escape plan.

He raced off the quay to the closest road, and a white rental car screeched to a stop. Yoshi Yataro's thugs were in it. Block was driving, Dryden in the passenger seat. Kenji leapt into the back of the car, and they sped away before he even had the door closed.

A taxi was idling at the curb, discharging a family on their way to the maritime museum. The CIA instantly swarmed it. Khatti flashed her badge, Wexler yanked the driver from the front seat, and Dante slipped behind the steering wheel.

"Stay with Charlie!" Khatti ordered Wexler as she climbed into the passenger seat.

But Charlie was already leaping into the back. Wexler tossed the cabbie aside and piled in himself.

Dante punched the gas and sped after the rental car.

"We're very sorry!" Charlie yelled out the window to the cabbie. "The CIA will reimburse you for any lost business!"

"You can't promise that," Wexler said.

Khatti glared at Charlie. "You shouldn't be here. You're a child. This is dangerous."

"Sorry," Charlie said. "Want to pull over and let me out?"

Khatti frowned, knowing that wasn't an option. Dante was speeding through the city streets, trying to catch up to the rental car.

"It's no use giving her orders," he said. "She'll never obey them."

Charlie heard sirens. She spun around to look out the rear window.

Two police cars were speeding down the road behind them, responding to the theft at the museum. Both took up the chase, coming after them.

Ahead, the rental car veered onto the on-ramp of a highway. Dante followed it, and the police cars followed them.

The highway arced around the southern end of the branch of the harbor where the maritime museum was located. On the left side of the car, Charlie could see the replica of the *Endeavour* and the other ships across the water, while on the right side, the skyscrapers of downtown Sydney soared above.

Ahead of them, the rental car swerved through traffic, purposefully cutting off other drivers, trying to create obstacles for the pursuing cars. The rental struck the bumper of an SUV, sending it into a spin directly in Dante's path. Dante expertly steered around it just before it came to a halt blocking both lanes of traffic, forcing the police cars to stop behind it.

Dante then gunned the engine, bearing down on the rental.

The cars sped around a bend in the highway. Ahead of them, the Harbor Bridge came into view.

The bridge was one of the iconic landmarks of Sydney. Designed for cars, pedestrians, and commuter trains, it was suspended from a pair of massive steel arches, which curved over the water from one bank of the harbor to the other. Locals often referred to it as the Coat Hanger because it looked somewhat like an extremely large one, minus the hook at the top.

The road to it was long and straight, flanked on the western side by commuter train tracks. The rental car picked up speed, and Dante went after it, stomping on the accelerator. The taxi flew down the highway so fast that Charlie noticed even Agent Khatti looked nervous.

"Dante," Khatti said, "this isn't worth dying for."

"I know what I'm doing," Dante assured her.

The taxi nearly pulled even with the rental as they closed in on the bridge's iron arches. By now, the road was several stories above the ground, higher than the rooftops of the surrounding buildings.

In the passenger seat of the rental, Dryden leveled a gun at them.

Dante suddenly yanked the steering wheel to the left, clipping the rear end of the rental car, sending it skidding. It skewed across the road, nearly passing into oncoming traffic, before Block wrestled it back under control. The rear of the rental fishtailed in front of a bus, which tore the back bumper off and spun the car like a top. It smashed into the railing alongside the train tracks and came to a dead stop.

Dante braked beside it. Khatti and Wexler leapt out of the taxi.

"Stay here!" Khatti ordered Charlie.

Charlie didn't listen and got out of the taxi.

Behind them, traffic screeched to a halt, causing a chain of fender benders and instantly jamming the road. Traffic coming the opposite direction backed up as well, as people slowed to stare at the scene of the accident.

The airbags had deployed in the front seats of the rental car, filling the air with white powder and the faint scent of burnt popcorn. In the driver's seat, Block was dazed, while in the passenger seat, Dryden was unconscious.

Meanwhile, Kenji was unscathed. He leapt from the back seat of the car, still holding the paper he had stolen from the museum.

There was only a low metal railing between the road and the train tracks, although a six-foot-tall wire fence ran along the far side of the tracks. A commuter train was barreling their way.

Kenji sprang over the low railing onto the tracks, heading for the opposite side.

The train was closer to the CIA agents than to Kenji, so they had less time to cross the tracks before it would arrive. Dante, Wexler, and Khatti all chose not to risk crossing them, fearful that they'd make a mistake and get flattened.

But Charlie saw the numbers.

She jumped the railing, dashed across the tracks, and scaled the wire fence on the far side with a half second to spare. The train missed her by inches, coming so close that the wind from it nearly knocked her off the fence. Through the windows, Charlie could see the faces of commuters, astonished there was a girl just outside the train.

Ten feet away, Kenji had also made it across the tracks, but the wind from the train caught him by surprise. It snapped the precious piece of paper from his hands and carried it toward the edge of the bridge.

Charlie jumped down from the wire fence and caught the paper just before it was blown out to sea. She briefly glimpsed a few curves in black ink on it, which looked like delicately drawn islands. It was a map.

But there was no time to take a good look.

She and Kenji were on a narrow strip between two sets of train tracks where steel struts descended from the arch to anchor the roadway. The commuter train was still hurtling past, cutting Charlie off from the CIA, meaning she was stuck on the same side with Kenji. Back at Cambridge, he had shown her no mercy. Only the kindness of strangers had saved her then; this time, there was no one to protect her.

And there was only one place Charlie could run.

Close to her, an iron ladder headed up one of the steel struts, so that workers could access the arch of the bridge. The lower half was wrapped with a steel-mesh cage to protect people from the trains, but the cage only extended fifteen feet up, beyond which there was access to the ladder.

Kenji ran toward Charlie, ready for a fight.

Charlie clamped the map in her teeth, leapt onto the mesh cage, and started climbing.

TWENTY-SIX

Somewhere over the Colorado Rockies

As Milana Moon watched the mountains pass below her, her worst fears were confirmed:

They were taking her to Black Sands.

Milana knew the geography of the western United States extremely well. As a certified pilot, she had flown over the Rockies many times.

There was little for her to do on the trip except stare out the window. As with all long flights from Europe, their route had taken them over Greenland, then cut southwest across Canada and the Great Plains. Even if Milana hadn't known that they were going well past Langley, she would have easily been able to figure it out, but she hadn't let on that she knew anything was wrong. She simply tried to work out where they were heading.

Below her, the lower flanks of the Rocky Mountains were a patchwork of dark green and bright yellow: The leaves of the aspen trees had changed to their fall color. Higher up, the barren peaks were gray, with the occasional patch of snow that had survived through the summer without melting. It was easy to spot Interstate 70 winding from east to west, as well as the distinct patterns where the trees had been removed to create runs at ski resorts. Milana had seen Vail and Aspen go by, as well as Snowmass, where she had first encountered Charlie Thorne nine months before.

It was startling to think how much her life had changed since then.

She knew that soon the plane would pass over the western edge of the Rockies and into the painted desert of southern Utah. And then they would come to Black Sands.

Black Sands was a covert high-security prison in the Nevada desert eighty miles northeast of Las Vegas. It was a small operation, known at the Agency as a dark site. There were no public records of the prisoners there, and it was blurred out on satellite maps. It was generally reserved for criminals who were deemed an extremely serious threat to the country, but Milana knew that on occasion, the CIA and other government agencies sent people there who they wanted to hide.

If Arthur Zell had really intended to trade Milana for Charlie Thorne, he would have brought her to CIA headquarters at Langley, Virginia. There were holding cells there, down in the basement, for exactly that sort of thing. But Black Sands was different. Sending Milana there indicated that Zell had no intention of ever returning her to active duty—or any semblance of a normal life at all. Instead, he intended to lock her away for good, to keep her from ever revealing that he had turned the CIA against its own agents. He had made a mistake and was covering it up, no matter what the costs, and Milana was

paying the price. Once Charlie Thorne had been delivered to Zell, he would surely send Dante off to Black Sands too. And Zell would be free to do whatever was necessary to get Charlie to cough up Pandora.

None of this was particularly surprising to Milana. She had suspected Zell would go to whatever lengths were necessary to protect himself. But it still upset her. She had devoted her life to the CIA, only to have her career derailed by a weaselly, self-serving director.

Milana didn't blame Charlie for what had happened. And she didn't blame the agents who had captured her either; they were merely following orders from the director of the CIA; if their roles were reversed, she would have done the same. But she still needed to neutralize Ford and Theodorakis, because she had no intention of getting locked up in Black Sands for the rest of her life.

Once they delivered her to the prison, there would be no chance of escape. So she had to take action before that.

Milana had never been to Black Sands, but she knew how it was designed. It had its own private airstrip, a lonely runway only a few hundred yards away. Prisoners were greeted by a phalanx of armed guards. Milana wouldn't stand a chance of fighting her way through all of them—and even if she did, there was no place for her to run. There was only sun-blasted, barren desert for fifty miles in each direction, and even in autumn, the temperature would be nearly a hundred degrees.

Milana needed to escape before the plane touched down.

That wouldn't be easy, but she had a plan.

After they had first been betrayed by the CIA, Dante and Milana had taken steps to protect themselves in case of situations exactly like this one.

For example, each had sewed small packets of sedative into the waistbands of every pair of pants they owned. (When you were on the run, you didn't own much clothing, so this hadn't taken much time.) The CIA had frisked Milana for weapons upon apprehending her, finding the metal shiv hidden in the sole of her shoe and the small blade stitched into the inseam of her pants, but they had missed the sedative.

The problem was, there wasn't much sedative, and while it acted quickly, it didn't last long. Milana had to time its use carefully, which was why it had been helpful to know she was going well past Langley. Otherwise, she might have deployed it too early, while they were over Greenland.

Getting Ford and Theodorakis to consume the sedative was also tricky. Milana could only hope that an opportunity presented itself, but she was running out of time.

However, there was one advantage to being held captive by fellow CIA agents: Milana knew how CIA agents behaved.

For example, most of them drank coffee. *Lots* of coffee.

Agents often had to put in long hours and to be prepared for action or briefings at any hour of the night. Most of them were addicted to caffeine. Coffee was everywhere at CIA headquarters; the campus even had its own Starbucks. So naturally, there was a coffee machine in the kitchenette of the jet.

Ford and Theodorakis were taking turns keeping an eye on Milana. Between that and the jet lag, both were exhausted. Ford was currently asleep, while Theodorakis was

gulping coffee to stay awake. He was seated on the opposite side of the jet from Milana, going over some documents.

Milana was pretending to be asleep once again, leaning her head against the window. That way, she could occasionally open the eye away from Theodorakis to observe the scenery below.

The CIA had put a monitor on her wrist that tracked her heartbeat; Milana and Dante had used one on Charlie when they'd had her in a situation very similar to this, after they'd first recruited her to find Pandora. Milana breathed slowly and meditated, keeping her heartbeat slow.

Every once in a while, she stole a glance at Theodorakis. She couldn't tell what the documents he was looking at were, but she figured some were the orders he had received from Zell, while others were probably orders for the staff at Black Sands. There was a steel attaché case to hold all the documents, although it was currently sitting open on the floor of the jet.

In addition to keeping you awake, coffee had another notable effect on the human body:

It made you have to pee.

Theodorakis had already gone to the bathroom twice since his shift watching her had begun two hours earlier, but Milana could hear him shifting around uncomfortably, needing to go again.

Out the window, through her open eye, she could see the western edge of the Rocky Mountains below them. The great jagged peaks gave way to smaller mountains, and then the reddish high desert of Utah.

Theodorakis got up from his seat.

Milana shut her eye.

Theodorakis stood over her for a moment, assessing her. Then he held a hand directly in front of her face to see if she'd react. Eventually, he seemed convinced she was asleep and headed for the small bathroom at the rear of the jet.

The moment he shut the door, Milana went to work. Even though her wrists were zip-tied, she had just enough freedom of motion to quickly remove the packet of sedative from her waistband. She moved slowly and kept breathing deeply to keep her heartbeat measured.

The coffee machine had an attachment that held water. Milana bit the end off the packet, dumped the powdered sedative into the water, then returned to her place by the window and pretended to be asleep again.

Theodorakis emerged from the bathroom three seconds later. He checked once more to make sure Milana was still asleep, then returned to his own seat.

Now all Milana could do was wait.

She estimated there were about forty-five minutes until they landed at Black Sands.

It was a narrow window. She could only hope that everything would time out right.

Or else she'd be spending the rest of her life in prison.

TWENTY-SEVEN

The Harbor Bridge in Sydney is unlike the other major bridges of the world in one unusual respect: Tourists are allowed to climb it.

Of course, for safety reasons, this activity is highly regulated. Tourists have to attend a training session beforehand, during which their physical ability is assessed, and then they are outfitted with special suits and harnesses. Each harness has a specially designed hook that locks onto a safety wire; the wire runs along the entire route, and there are also guard rails, which make it impossible for anyone to fall off the bridge. In addition, tourists are not allowed to bring anything that can be accidentally dropped, like wallets, phones, or hats, and each group is shepherded by two experienced guides, one at the front and one at the back.

Once the protective gear is factored in, the Harbor Bridge is quite safe and easy to climb. As opposed to the thin, rounded cables of the Golden Gate or Brooklyn Bridges, the steel arches that support the Harbor Bridge are wide and sturdy, and they ascend in a gentle curve. There are only a few tricky points to negotiate.

One of these is the ladder up to the arch itself. Once Charlie had cleared the protective cage around the lower section, she found the rest of the ladder to be steep and exposed. She had no way to hook onto the safety wire and had to simply hold on tight as she climbed. The real danger wasn't falling into the water, which might have been survivable, even from this height. Instead, Charlie would have fallen onto the train tracks that passed on both sides of the ladder, which would have been a far more painful place to land. She would have certainly broken bones and ruptured a few organs upon impact, after which a train would probably have flattened her.

Still, she couldn't turn back, and she couldn't take the time to proceed cautiously. Kenji was coming up the ladder right behind her, moving as nimbly as a squirrel scrambling up a tree. The wind whipped at Charlie, and every time a train rumbled past below, the ladder vibrated like a plucked guitar string, but she ignored it all and focused on moving as quickly as she could.

Several stories up, the ladder reached a small platform where the curve of the arch began.

A crowd of tourists was gathered there, preparing to head down.

"Excuse me," Charlie said pleasantly, as though she were encountering them on a normal street corner, rather than several hundred feet above the harbor. "Coming through!" Then she slipped past them all and dashed up the arch.

"Hey!" a guide yelled after her. "You're not supposed to be up here without a harness!"

“I don’t *want* to be up here without one!” Charlie yelled back, then continued onward.

The guides and the tourists stared after her, stunned, only to be even more surprised when Kenji arrived a few seconds later and roughly shoved through them.

Charlie raced up the slope of the arch.

She was heading the opposite direction of the tourist route, which meant there were more groups ahead of her, clustered at various points so that the guides could take photos of them. But otherwise, the going was quite easy. The arch was three times as wide as a city sidewalk, and the tourist route ran straight up the middle of it, flanked by the guardrails, which left plenty of room on each side before the drop. Charlie felt safe enough to take a look at the map in her hand as she ran. She aimed to memorize what she could, just in case Kenji caught up to her and stole it back.

Only the map was more complex and detailed than she had hoped it might be.



While Charlie’s mind was unusually adept at memorizing facts and numbers, she had a much harder time with shapes. To her dismay, she realized she would never be able to fully recall the random assortment of crenellated blobs that Cook had drawn. If she wanted to find Newton’s treasure, she couldn’t allow Kenji to recover the map.

However, he was faster and more agile than she was, and he was closing the gap between them.

Charlie suddenly had a chilling thought. It was possible that Kenji might not merely steal the map from her. He might also toss her off the bridge so that she wouldn’t cause him any more trouble.

She crammed the map into her pocket and ran as fast as she could.

Halfway up the arch, she encountered the second cluster of tourists. Both of the guides attempted to grab her, but she wriggled past the first and then pushed a startled tourist into the second. Both people went down in a sprawl of arms and legs, creating what Charlie hoped would be an obstacle to slow Kenji down.

It didn’t work.

Kenji simply hopped over the guardrail onto the unprotected portion of the arch. Now there was nothing to prevent him from falling off the edge onto the train tracks, but there was still plenty of room before the drop, and Kenji showed no concern about the height. He quickly skirted the pile of people and then leapt back into the tourist route without missing a beat.

Charlie arrived at the highest point on the bridge. Ahead of her, the bridge slowly arced downward toward the opposite side of the harbor from where she had started, but a maintenance rig was blocking her path halfway down, so she couldn’t go that way. There was only one option: A catwalk ran atop a steel brace between the arches, allowing the tourists to cross from one side of the bridge to the other. The brace was significantly

narrower than the arch had been. There was no safe space outside the guardrail; instead, there was only a sheer drop down onto the roadway a hundred feet below.

Therefore, crossing the brace was the most intimidating part of the tour. Another group of tourists was clustered at the far side, gathering their nerve before attempting it.

Charlie had no time to do that. She hurried across the brace. Now she was ten stories above the road itself.

On the far side, the guides shifted position, preparing to stop her. Both appeared angry at her, presuming she was a daredevil out to cause trouble. They were yelling at her, telling her she was breaking the law. A few gung-ho tourists even got ready to help grab her.

Charlie realized she wouldn't be able to get past them all. But she couldn't backtrack, either. Kenji was coming.

Which meant she now had to do something very dangerous.

There were a lot of other steel braces between the arches. Some went directly across the gap, while others were diagonal. Two of the diagonal ones connected to the arch at the same point as the catwalk, making a V as they splayed in opposite directions. Neither had a catwalk atop it. They were merely thin beams, only a few inches wide.

Just before Charlie reached the second arch, where the guides were prepared to grab her, she leapt over the safety rail toward one of the braces.

For a brief, sickening moment, there was nothing but air below her.

Then she landed on the brace. Her momentum almost carried her off the other side. She had to windmill her arms to catch her balance and keep from falling.

But then she had to will herself to jump again.

She told herself that, if she had been only a few feet above the ground, she wouldn't have given it a second thought. It was only the fear of falling that made it unsettling, and the fear was irrational, because she *wouldn't* fall. It was as easy as jumping from the street onto a curb. She didn't even have to see the numbers.

Still, the fear crept in. Charlie faltered for a split second, which was enough to throw her off. Instead of getting a good, solid leap, she barely made it to the steel arch. Her left heel hung over the void, and she nearly pitched backward.

The tourists gave a collective gasp of terror.

But then Charlie caught her balance once again; she leaned forward and grasped the guardrail. Relief flooded through her. Her risky shortcut had taken her around the tour guides.

Then she saw Kenji.

He was crossing another steel brace, one that stretched between the arches slightly lower than the one Charlie had used. It didn't have a catwalk either, and yet, Kenji didn't appear the slightest bit fazed by the narrow footing or the precipitous drop below him. He dashed along the brace as though it were merely a painted line in a parking lot, aiming to reach the steel arch a few yards down from Charlie and cut off her escape.

Charlie realized she had to move quickly if she wanted to prevent that from happening. She didn't even have a spare second to jump back over the guardrail to the safety of the tourist route. Instead, she ran down along the unprotected edge of the arch

as fast as she could. The drop wasn't far from her, but the guardrail was close enough for her to grab onto in case of trouble, which made a big difference psychologically.

She passed the point where Kenji's brace connected with the arch just before he arrived. He lunged the last few feet, his fingers grazing her arm as she raced past. He slammed into the guardrail hard but recovered quickly and came after her.

Kenji had now completely closed the gap between them. He stayed right on Charlie's heels as she fled down the arch.

Charlie no longer had time to fear falling. She was far more afraid of what might happen if Kenji caught her. Although he was quick and strong, she was able to stay just ahead of him, now that she was heading downward and fueled by adrenaline. Since she was outside the guardrail, the tourists were no longer an issue. She flew past another startled group of them.

Kenji kept up with her. He was close enough that she could hear him breathing.

Charlie was approaching the end of the arch, which mirrored the opposite side of the bridge, where she had started up. Once again, there was a landing and a ladder, which passed down through a mesh cage. Only on this side of the bridge, there were no train tracks. Instead, the ladder was flanked on both sides by the road.

Charlie was almost back to where she had started. On the other side of the bridge, Khatti and Wexler had pulled Block and Dryden out of the wrecked car. Traffic was now backed up for what looked like a mile behind them, although on Charlie's side, it was still racing past below her.

Meanwhile, Dante was watching her. Even from a distance, she could see the concern on his face. He tried to cut across oncoming traffic to come to her rescue, but it was all moving too quickly.

Charlie reached the landing just ahead of Kenji, leapt over the safety rail, and started down the ladder.

And then she noticed the tour group coming up.

They were blocking her way down. And Kenji was nearly on top of her, blocking her way up.

On both sides of the ladder below her, vehicles were roaring past.

A semi truck was coming, barreling along the road.

Charlie saw the numbers.

She hesitated on the ladder, needing to time things just right.

Kenji reached down to grab her.

Charlie jumped.

She sailed through the air and landed atop the semi's trailer. Her momentum carried her forward, sending her tumbling along the roof. The truck was moving in the opposite direction, so she nearly rolled off the back into traffic. But she had timed everything perfectly and came to a stop right at the rear edge, where she grabbed on tightly.

Her jump had caught Kenji by surprise. By the time he'd realized what she was doing, it was far too late to follow—and he didn't have her ability to calculate how to land safely anyhow. All he could do was stare after her in astonishment and frustration as the truck whisked her away, along with the map that he had gone through so much trouble to steal.

Charlie lay atop the truck, so exhausted she could barely move.

Although she did manage a cocky wave goodbye to Kenji as she left him behind.

TWENTY-EIGHT

Theodorakis didn't wake Ford until only fifteen minutes before landing. The first thing Ford did was visit the bathroom, and then she made herself a cup of coffee; she was obviously still groggy and tired.

Theodorakis made a cup too.

By this point, they were well into southern Utah, and Milana was aware she was running out of time. She didn't know if the caffeine in the coffee would counteract the sedative and slow it down—or keep it from working at all. If it didn't work, she was going to have to take more aggressive steps to escape, which could easily go wrong.

Despite her attempts to remain calm, her nerves got the better of her. Her heart began to beat faster, which triggered the monitor.

"Getting excited to see your new home?" Theodorakis asked tauntingly. There was no point in pretending they were heading back to Langley; it was obvious they were well past the eastern United States.

"You're making a mistake," Milana told him. She was sure she wasn't going to change Ford's and Theodorakis's minds but figured it couldn't hurt to try. Besides, she had to act natural to get them to drop their guard, and trying to talk your way out of going to jail was the natural thing to do. "Zell's the real criminal here. He set me up."

"Shut up, traitor," Ford said, then sipped her coffee.

Milana fell quiet. She didn't want to get Ford or Theodorakis riled up, as that might counteract the sedative as well. Instead, she returned her attention to watching the landscape outside the window, reviewing her escape plan in her mind while waiting for her captors to get sleepy.

It happened to Theodorakis first. He was bigger, but he'd been drinking the coffee longer. He was sitting in his seat, looking over files, when his head started nodding. He didn't show concern; his wits were too dulled for that. He just looked like any person struggling to stay awake. After a minute, he slumped to the side, snoring.

Ford smacked his shoulder. "Wake up," she said. "We're about to land."

But Theodorakis kept sleeping.

Ford yawned herself, then seemed to recognize that something was wrong. She fixed Milana with a bleary-eyed stare. "What'd you do?"

"Nothing," Milana insisted.

Ford grew concerned. She tried to unbuckle her seat belt, but her hands didn't work the way she'd hoped. By the time she managed to unlatch the buckle, she no longer had the ability to stand on her own two feet. "Hey!" she yelled to the pilots. "We've got—" That was all she could manage. Then she too slumped over.

Milana sprang to her feet. She figured they were only ten minutes away from Black Sands. The jet was already descending.

Theodorakis and Ford were both armed with guns, Tasers, and special blades to remove the zip ties. Milana took the blade off Theodorakis's belt and cut the ties binding her wrists.

Then she refastened Ford's seat belt. She was going to need it.

She rifled through Ford's pockets, found her phone, and took it.

The attaché case still lay open beside Theodorakis's seat. Milana now saw that, in addition to the sealed orders from Zell, it held everything the CIA had impounded from her, Dante, and Charlie: their fake passports and IDs, their phones, their cash. She slammed it shut and locked it.

Milana knew her way around the interior of a CIA jet. She had spent plenty of time in them. She went to the rear compartment where the parachutes were stored, grabbed one for herself, and strapped it on.

She also took a bottle of water from the minibar and tucked it into her pocket.

Next, she took the gun from Theodorakis. She stood with her back to the agents so that they wouldn't get hurt, took careful aim—and blasted a hole through one of the plane's windows.

She had always planned to do this somewhere along the approach to the airport, after the plane had begun its descent. Airplane cabins were generally pressurized to an altitude of 8,000 feet, while the standard cruising altitude for a plane was around 30,000 feet above sea level. Blowing a hole in the window at that height would have been disastrous, somewhat like poking a hole in a balloon. All the air inside the plane would try to rush outside through the tiny hole. The jet was certainly more structurally rigid than a balloon, but still, it could have been torn apart by the stress, and anything—or anyone—inside would have also been dragged toward the hole.

However, Milana was much lower to the ground than she had hoped. She figured she was only about 2,000 to 3,000 feet up. The ground was probably another 3,000 feet above sea level in that part of the country, and the pilots would have been depressurizing the cabin as they descended, so in theory, the pressures inside and outside the plane were close, but the effects of the window being blown out were still dramatic. Air rushed toward the hole, the jet trembled, and the emergency air masks dropped from the ceiling compartments.

Not surprisingly, the pilots immediately realized something was wrong. While the pilot steadied the jet, the copilot burst through the cockpit door to see what was happening—and found Milana pointing the gun at him.

"Dismantle the door locks," Milana ordered.

The copilot froze in fear. "I can't do that."

"Yes you can. I know this plane. It can be done from inside the cockpit. Do it, or there'll be trouble."

The copilot glanced at the unconscious agents, buckled into their seats.

"They're just asleep," Milana assured him. "Still alive and well—but that can change." She took a step toward him with the gun. "Dismantle the door. This isn't worth dying

for.”

The copilot nodded nervously, then ducked back into the cockpit and locked the door. He wasn't hiding from Milana; he was protecting himself and the pilot against what would happen next.

A few seconds later, Milana heard the telltale click of the jet door's locks disengaging. A warning light came on above it.

Milana grabbed the attaché case.

Then she tore off the protective cover over the door latch. An alarm began to sound.

Milana punched a red button on the wall.

The door slid open. It was designed to do this, in case of extreme emergencies, so that passengers could parachute out.

Even though the cabin had depressurized to match the atmosphere outside, there was still a great rush of air, due to the speed of the jet. Milana had to brace herself to make sure she wasn't yanked out of the plane. That was the direction she wanted to go, but still, when she went, she wanted to be under control.

She glanced at the ground below her. The jet was now a lot lower than she had hoped to be, but there wasn't much she could do about that. Every second she waited, she'd be even lower.

She clutched the attaché case tightly to her chest and leapt out of the plane.

Normally, skydivers jumped from somewhere between 10,000 and 13,000 feet above the ground. From that height, you were far enough from the earth that you didn't really have the sense of the ground rushing up at you. But Milana was barely a thousand feet up, less than the height of the Empire State Building, and the experience was very different. Without a parachute, she would only have ten seconds until impact.

She pulled the rip cord as quickly as she could.

It took slightly over three seconds for the parachute to deploy, by which time, Milana was already dangerously close to the ground. The chute yanked her to what felt like an abrupt stop in the air, so hard that the attaché case was nearly torn from her grasp. But of course, she was still heading down fast.

Milana had to react quickly. She scanned the area around her for a safe place to land. There didn't seem to be a town or a road, even a ranch, anywhere nearby. The desert ground was jagged and full of brambles, none of which would make for an easy landing. If she came down too hard and broke her leg, she'd be in big trouble. Either the CIA would come find her—or worse, no one would. She'd be stranded in the wilderness until she died of dehydration.

Then, not far ahead, Milana spotted a wide, barren strip of red rock. She tugged on the controls for her parachute and glided that way.

It was only as she came closer that she noticed there was a narrow crevice slicing through the rock. A slot canyon.

Southern Utah was full of them: steep, narrow chasms carved in the sandstone by streams over thousands of years; for all Milana knew, this one could be a few hundred feet deep. If she got dragged into it, she'd get bashed around and maybe end up dangling from her chute. But she had no time to alter her course; the ground was right there. She planted

her feet and tried to stop. It was almost a textbook landing, but the wind took the chute and pulled her onward. She dropped the attaché case and leaned back hard, throwing herself into a sitting position and drawing the ropes in. The parachute kept tugging at her, pulling her right to the edge of the slot, but then it gave up and collapsed, the silk falling to the ground on the opposite side of the gap.

Milana heaved a sigh of relief and lay flat on her back, spent. The red rock was warm from the autumn sun.

Above her, the CIA jet was already so far away that it was hard to spot. Milana had thought they might circle back to search for her, but with the door gone and the hull of the plane breached, it made sense that they were putting their safety first and heading to the closest place to land. Probably Black Sands.

Still, they'd mount a search mission. She had to keep moving.

She unlatched her parachute harness and got to her feet, taking in her surroundings.

The bottle of water was no longer in her pocket. It must have fallen out at some point during her rapid descent and was now lost somewhere in the acres of sagebrush around her.

She was in the middle of the desert, the sun was beating down on her, and she had no food or water.

She might have escaped the CIA, but she still had to survive.

TWENTY-NINE

The semi truck pulled off the highway in downtown Sydney, and at the first traffic light, Charlie climbed down from it. The driver never even noticed that she had stowed away.

The national botanic garden was across the street. Charlie sat on a bench there, examining the map she had recovered while waiting for the CIA.

They arrived five minutes later, pinpointing the tracker on her wrist. They were still in the stolen taxi. Wexler drove, with Dante in the passenger seat. Khatti sat in the back. She opened the rear door at the curb, indicating she wanted Charlie to get in beside her.

Charlie did so, and Wexler pulled away, moving into downtown traffic.

Khatti immediately held out her hand. "You got the map?"

Charlie handed it over. "You're welcome."

Khatti ignored her and examined the piece of paper.

Despite how angry Dante had been at Charlie since London, he now gave her a worried look. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. Thanks for asking." Charlie directed this toward Khatti, making it clear Charlie was annoyed at her for not asking the question herself. "Did you get any information out of those meatheads?"

"They didn't know anything," Khatti said coldly. "They were just hired help. Didn't even know who they were working for."

"You're sure they weren't just saying that?" Charlie asked skeptically.

"We didn't have time to interrogate them properly," Khatti replied. "We had to beat it before the police showed up. That stunt of yours on the bridge grabbed a lot of attention."

"I was running for my life on the bridge," Charlie corrected. "Getting you *that*." She pointed at the map. "And besides, the car wreck you guys caused was gonna draw the police anyhow."

Khatti frowned at the map. "This better have been worth all the trouble we went through to get it."

"We?" Charlie repeated. "I don't remember seeing *you* fleeing from a ninja on that bridge."

"Ninjas were covert missionaries in feudal Japan," Khatti said dismissively. "That man was merely an enemy agent."

"What happened to him?" Charlie asked.

"He escaped," Dante said. "Jumped onto another truck, the same way you did. There was no way for us to go after him."

"This map is useless," Khatti observed angrily. "It doesn't even indicate where

Newton's treasure is located."

Charlie asked, "Were you expecting that Cook would mark some spot and write 'Secret treasure hidden here'?"

"I was expecting more than *this*."

"I suppose there might have been more," Charlie said. "Kenji might have grabbed other maps that I didn't see. Or maybe there were more at the museum and this was all he got. We could go back there and..."

"That's not happening. After he stole one map, there's no way the museum is going to allow us a chance to look at what's left."

"They might. You're CIA. You could say you need to see the other maps as part of an investigation into finding out who stole them."

"I doubt the Australians would comply. And even if they did, it could take days to get approval."

"Kenji obviously thought that map was the right one," Dante put in. "And he seems to know what he's doing. So maybe the information we want is on there, but it's just not obvious. Can I see it?"

Khatti handed it over to him.

Wexler merged onto the highway, heading back toward the airport.

It occurred to Charlie that they hadn't even been in Sydney for two hours and were already leaving.

"Hmmm," Dante said thoughtfully.

Charlie looked at him, intrigued. "Did you find something?"

Dante twisted around in the front seat to display the map.



"Look here," he said, pointing to the inscription at the top. "Cook says the reefs are 'exceptionally' dangerous to navigate."

"So?" Wexler asked. "That makes sense."

"Any reef is dangerous to navigate," Dante observed. "The word 'exceptionally' seems unnecessary—and Cook wasn't dramatic when he made his maps. He generally let the charts speak for themselves. Which brings me to another thing: The word 'exceptionally' overlaps the reef itself. That's unusual. A good cartographer like Cook would believe that showing the contours of the reef was the entire purpose of this map. He had plenty of room to put the words to the east of the reef, so why obscure some of it with them?"

Khatti's eyes lit up with understanding. "Because the position of the words is important."

"Exactly." Dante pointed to the word "exceptionally." "Notice anything unusual about this?"

Khatti sat forward and scrutinized the map. "The *x* doesn't match the rest of the writing."

“Right again. Instead, it looks a whole lot like this one.” Dante pointed to the other X on the map.

“So the x in ‘exceptionally’ is showing where the discovery is hidden,” Khatti concluded.

“That’s what I’m thinking,” Dante agreed.

“ X marks the spot,” Charlie stated, then gave Dante a grin. “Nice observation, big brother.”

Dante gave her a frown in return. “Of course, it’s possible I’m wrong about this.”

“We’ll find out soon enough,” Khatti said. “We’ll be there tomorrow.”

THIRTY

The Great Barrier Reef is actually a conglomeration of nearly 3,000 individual reefs, arrayed along the northeastern shore of Queensland, Australia. Altogether, it covers 133,000 square miles, which makes it larger than the entire country of Italy. And yet, it was all built by animals only a few millimeters in size.

Corals are colonial organisms composed of hundreds of thousands of individual animals called polyps. A polyp is a relatively simple creature: It is mostly stomach, with a mouth surrounded by tentacles. (The stomach has no other opening; polyps consume their food and expel their waste through their mouths.) Some corals grow very slowly, less than half a centimeter a year, although others can grow as much as ten centimeters in that time. A single coral formation can be the work of millions of generations of polyps.

The Great Barrier Reef is relatively young, geologically. The original inhabitants of Australia were already living there when it formed. Only twenty thousand years ago, during the last ice age, the location of the reef was above water; it was a coastal plain covered in forests. Then the ice age ended, the ice caps melted, and the oceans rose, flooding the land. Corals thrived in the shallow, warm, nutrient-rich water, eventually creating the reef.

Coral reefs are among the most diverse ecosystems on earth, and the Great Barrier Reef is home to an astounding variety of marine life: over four hundred varieties of coral, thirty species of whales and dolphins, six species of sea turtle, two hundred species of bird, fifteen hundred species of fish, and five thousand species of mollusk—notably giant clams, the largest mollusks that have ever existed, which can grow over a meter long and live over seventy years.

The Great Barrier Reef is renowned for its beauty, although it can also be extremely dangerous. The labyrinth of reefs has caused at least twelve hundred shipwrecks, the very first of which was James Cook's. Cook was the first Western captain to ever encounter the reef—and it nearly destroyed his ship and marooned him and his crew in Australia for the rest of their lives. (It would be fifty years until another European ship visited the region.)

On June 11, 1770, just over a month after leaving Botany Bay, on a clear and moonlit night, the *Endeavour* crashed into a coral reef thirteen miles off the coast. The ship stopped abruptly, but the surf continued to pound it, rocking it so violently that Joseph Banks reported the crew could “hardly keep our legs upon the Quarter deck.” The sharp points of the coral punctured the wooden hull, and the *Endeavour* began to flood.

Cook had most likely leapt out of bed to deal with the emergency; Banks later described the captain as handling the crisis in his underwear. When repeated attempts to get the ship off the reef failed, Cook ordered a more desperate measure: throwing things

overboard. The idea was to lighten the weight of the *Endeavour* so that the water could lift it off the reef. Over the course of the night, the crew tossed just about anything that wasn't nailed down into the sea: six of their cannons, firewood, water casks—and even food. But it didn't work. The *Endeavour* remained stuck... and then things got even worse.

Water began to stream in faster than the crew could pump it out. Soon the water in the hold was over four feet deep, which Cook referred to as “an alarming and... terrible circumstance.” Eventually, after more than twenty-four hours of struggle, the crew managed to free the ship from the reef at high tide, but now it was in danger of sinking. They had to resort to another desperate measure known as fothering: a sail was covered with a sticky mix of tar, wool, sheep's dung and (according to Cook) “other filth” and then slung underneath the leaking hull with ropes, where it would hopefully stick fast like an enormous Band-Aid. To the great relief of Cook and his crew, it worked. The *Endeavour* didn't sink, although it still remained stranded in a deadly maze of reefs. Colliding with any of one them would have meant disaster for the already weakened ship. It took another five days for the *Endeavour* to cover the thirteen miles to the mainland and find a safe place to moor: the outlet of a river that, to this day, is named after the *Endeavour* itself.

The coral had done so much damage that Cook and his men had to spend the next two months at the reef, making repairs. They found the area far less hospitable than Botany Bay. The coast was lined with thick, almost impenetrable mangrove swamps where saltwater crocodiles lurked. Salties are the largest member of the crocodile family and are easily big enough to kill and consume a full-grown man. Even today, they are responsible for the deaths of several people a year in Australia.

The English also encountered dingoes, wild dogs that they mistook for wolves, and enormous flying foxes, which are actually harmless fruit-eating members of the bat family, but which the sailors still found unsettling. Even more bizarre were startlingly large creatures that looked vaguely like giant rabbits, which bounded along on their hind legs and kept their young in pouches on their stomachs. But the most bothersome animals were the mosquitos, which Banks claimed followed them like clouds of smoke. Even though the weather was miserably hot, the crew still gathered around campfires at night to keep the insects away.

Cook and his men also met the natives who lived in the area, although it took a while. At first, the natives seemed to have little interest in the English at all, and once contact was finally made, their culture was so different that the English found it perplexing. Many of the people they had met on their voyage had been fascinated by English goods: their clothes, their weapons, and the iron nails that held the ship together. But the Australians didn't care for any of it. The English gave them clothes and other trinkets, only to find them discarded in piles, as though it was all useless garbage. Most of the crew considered this foolish, although Cook noted that, while the Australians appeared to be “the most Wretched people upon Earth,” in reality they were far happier than the Europeans, as they had no wants at all and felt they were “provided with all the necessarys of Life.”

The Europeans were equally confusing to the Australians. According to oral histories

of the tribe that encountered Cook, because the Europeans were so pale, the natives originally thought they were bizarre overgrown babies. Eventually, the Australians came to believe that the strangers were white spirits, or ghosts of deceased ancestors.

Sadly, Cook's arrival was ultimately disastrous for the Australians. Although Cook found the area forbidding, a century later, the landing he discovered would become a key port for a gold rush. There, as throughout Australia, the traditional Australian ways of life abruptly came to an end. The natives were decimated by European diseases—and even worse, by racist European policies.

At the site of Cook's landing, the local tribe was known as the Guugu Yimithirr. At the start of the gold rush, there were estimated to be about a thousand members. When European settlers tried to take their land, the Guugu Yimithirr rebelled. Many were slaughtered. The rest were forcibly relocated. Today, their land is home to a small city called Cooktown.

It is a great irony that James Cook, who probably named more places than any other human in history, has so few places named after him. Christopher Columbus has ten cities in the United States alone named after him—as well as the capital of the entire country. (The “District of Columbia” in Washington, DC, is a reference to him.) Amerigo Vespucci, the relatively unknown explorer who realized that Columbus had stumbled across another continent, got that continent and the one to the south named after him—about 30 percent of all the land on earth. The biggest cities in Australia—Sydney and Melbourne—were named after British politicians who never even visited the country. Meanwhile, Cooktown is a small settlement with less than three thousand residents.

It is located about halfway up the Cape York Peninsula, which juts out of the northeastern corner of Australia like a finger pointed at Papua New Guinea. While much of Australia is desert, the eastern mountains of Cape York receive a great deal of rain, and their flanks are covered with lush tropical forests. Most of the area is wilderness. There are only a few roads, and Cooktown sits at the end of one, a lonely outpost at the edge of the frontier. Half the streets are dirt, and the downtown is only a smattering of businesses interspersed with empty lots of grass, as though the original planners had expected the city to get a lot bigger, but it hadn't. Three hours to the south, Port Douglas and Cairns get the lion's share of the tourism, with large marinas that send boats packed with tourists out to the reef every day, but due to its remoteness, Cooktown attracts only a fraction of those visitors.

Cooktown did have a very small airport, a strip of tarmac so remote it felt a bit like Duxford had. Charlie and the CIA flew directly there from Sydney, then took one of the few taxis the short distance to town. Charlie had hoped they could head to the reef right away, but it was the beginning of the rainy season. Known as the Wet, it was marked by daily thunderstorms. The rain would come for a few hours, and the rest of the time, it was exceptionally humid. Therefore, there were few tourists about. Many of the businesses had shuttered for the season. It took a bit of work to find a captain willing to take a private scuba charter out to Rosser Reef, and by the time they did, a storm had swept in; the rain was coming down in sheets, and lightning was flashing every few

seconds, making it far too dangerous to head out onto the water.

So they were forced to wait until the next morning.

Charlie could barely sleep. In addition to wanting to hunt for Newton's discovery, she was also excited to simply see the Great Barrier Reef. It was something she had always dreamed of. She had taken a scuba diving course as an elective in college. You only had to be twelve to get certified, so she had signed up the first chance she got. However, all her training had been done in swimming pools. Before she'd ever had the chance to go in the ocean, Dante had shown up and turned her life upside down. So the idea of finally getting to see an actual reef—the Great Barrier Reef itself, no less—was thrilling.

Morning finally came, heralding a perfect day. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, and the ocean was as flat as glass.

It was standard procedure for scuba boats to head out early, when the water was calm and clear. Charlie and the CIA found their captain and two crewmen ready to go at the boat dock. The captain was a woman who had spent so much time in the sun that her skin was the color and texture of a baseball glove. The crew were a young man and woman of Aboriginal descent. The boat was relatively small; more of it was devoted to storing scuba tanks than to seating for passengers. There was only a spindly canopy stretched above it to provide shade, and when Khatti asked where the bathrooms were, the captain merely pointed to the ocean and said, "If that's good enough for ten billion fish, it ought to be good enough for you."

The captain had originally balked at the idea of heading all the way out to Rosser Reef, insisting there were plenty of better dive sites closer to Cooktown, but when Khatti flashed a wad of hundred-dollar bills, the captain quickly agreed to try something new. "The customer is always right," she said, in a tone that indicated she didn't believe it, and then took them out to sea.

As the boat skimmed across the crystal-clear water, heading for the reef, Charlie noted that no one else appeared excited about their expedition. Khatti and Wexler looked glum and dour, while Dante seemed nervous. Dante hadn't spoken much to Charlie since their argument in London, which didn't sit well with Charlie. So she sat next to her brother in the bow of the boat and asked, "What are you so worried about? Is it the box jellyfish?"

Dante looked at her, concerned. "What's a box jellyfish?"

"It's the most venomous jellyfish in the world," Charlie replied. "Some people even say it's the most venomous marine animal, period. Their tentacles are covered with these things called nematocysts, which are like little poison darts. If they sting you, it can cause paralysis, cardiac arrest—or even death."

Dante paled. "And they live *here*?"

"Oh yeah. Because, you know, it's Australia."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Basically, Australian wildlife can be split into two categories: cutest animals on the planet—or deadliest. In the cute category, there's koalas, naturally. But then there's also wallabies, echidnas, wombats, and possums...."

"Possums aren't cute. They look like rats with fur coats."

"You're thinking of an American possum. An Australian possum is freaking adorable."

And they're still nowhere nearly as cute as quokkas."

"Quokkas?"

"They're these marsupials that look like teddy bears that have come to life. It's like someone built a random cuteness generator and cranked it to eleven. There are also really cute penguins in Australia, although they live much farther south than here. They're called fairy blue penguins, and they're precious—although they do have the highest velocity poop of any animal on earth. I have no idea who figured that out—or why—but it's true."

"But they're not dangerous?" Dante asked.

Charlie looked at him curiously. "Why would a penguin be dangerous?"

"You just said *everything* here was deadly. And maybe that high-velocity poop can kill...."

"No, the penguins are harmless. In the deadly category, you have the saltwater crocodile, the funnel-web spider, the one hundred varieties of venomous snakes, the cassowary—which is one of the only birds that has been known to kill humans..."

"How can a bird kill a human?"

"Well, they're very large. Like six feet tall. And they have really muscular legs. So, if they feel threatened, they'll chase people, peck them, headbutt them, jump on them—or disembowel them with their claws. But cassowaries live on land, so we don't really have to worry about them today. Instead, the reef has sharks, stonefish, blue-ringed octopuses, stingrays, sea snakes, and textile cone snails."

Dante gaped at her. "There's a deadly *snail*?"

"Yes. It has this weird harpoon tooth that can penetrate human skin and then inject its venom. So you need to keep your distance from them."

"You enjoy freaking me out with all this stuff, don't you?"

This was true, but Charlie didn't admit it. Instead, she said, "I'm trying to look out for you. Because we're family, and that's what family does, right?"

Dante grunted noncommittally.

Charlie waved to the reef around them. "You should be aware that there's some dangerous stuff out there. To be honest, most of it won't bother you unless you bother it: the sharks, the stonefish, the octopus, the snails. But the box jellyfish is a concern, because they can just drift right into you. Luckily, their little darts can't penetrate neoprene, so if we wear wetsuits, we ought to be fine."

Dante sighed. "That's a relief."

"If you weren't upset about the box jellyfish, then what *are* you upset about?"

Dante subtly nodded toward Khatti and Wexler, who sat at the stern of the boat, too far away to hear Dante and Charlie over the roar of the outboard motors. "I'm upset because *they're* upset."

"Khatti's *always* upset," Charlie replied. "Ever since I met her, she's looked like someone peed in her cornflakes."

"Well, she's more upset than usual today."

"Are you sure she's not just concerned about having to go to the bathroom in the ocean?"

"I've seen her in far worse conditions than this. The bathrooms aren't an issue. Something's wrong. Something she isn't telling us."

"Any idea what it is?"

"My guess is it has something to do with Milana."

Now Charlie grew concerned. "Why? Did Khatti say anything about her?"

"No. Which is exactly the problem. She hasn't mentioned Milana once. She should have been at Langley hours ago. But Khatti hasn't reported a thing."

"So why not ask her for an update?"

"There's no point. We'd have better luck getting one of those giant clams to talk."

"You mean you haven't even tried?" Charlie hopped to her feet and walked across the jouncing deck of the boat to where Khatti and Wexler were seated. She flashed a bright smile and asked, "Any word on Milana?"

Khatti responded with a frown. "Right now, your sole focus should be on finding Newton's discovery."

Charlie frowned too. Although Khatti's non-answer wasn't the reason.

She was more concerned about Wexler's reaction to her question. He had averted his eyes, looking downright worried.

Which made Charlie worried as well. Suddenly the day no longer seemed as exciting.

Where was Milana?

THIRTY-ONE

Zion National Park

Even though Milana was in the desert, it was freezing.

It was the middle of the night, and the temperature had plummeted the moment the sun went down. To make matters worse, she was in the slot canyon. If she had stayed up on the surface, where she had landed, the ground would have held some heat from the sun, and she could have buried herself in the dirt to preserve body heat. But down here, where the sun never shone, it was always cold, and the ground was solid rock.

She had chosen to descend into the canyon for a few reasons. First of all, she had been exposed up on the surface. Once the CIA landed their damaged jet at Black Sands, they would have quickly shifted to another aircraft—a helicopter, perhaps—to come search for her. And it wouldn't have been long until they found her.

In addition, there was often water in slot canyons. Since Milana had lost her water bottle on the drop, she needed more to survive.

Finally, the best way to find civilization was to follow a stream. Milana was relatively sure that she was somewhere inside Zion National Park. The centerpiece of Zion was a very large slot canyon along the Virgin River. Dozens of smaller canyons split off from the main one; if she was in one of those, she would eventually get to the center of the park, which had a road going through the middle of it, as well as a nice lodge and plenty of helpful park rangers.

Her major concern was that, on occasion, a slot canyon wasn't flat at the bottom. She might encounter a steep drop at some point, and if there was no way down it, she'd be trapped. But as far as she knew, most of the canyons in Zion were relatively flat. It was getting into them that was the problem.

That was where the parachute had come in.

To descend into a steep canyon, you needed ropes and, if possible, a harness to hold you. A parachute was essentially ropes and a harness. So Milana had found an outcropping of rock on the edge to anchor herself and rigged up a belay system. Then she had wadded up the parachute silk and the remaining ropes, repacked it all as well as she could, then taken it and the attaché case and rappelled into the canyon.

Thankfully, there was a creek at the bottom, and it was flowing nicely. Stagnant water bred mosquitoes and disease, but moving water tended to be fresh and safe to drink. Milana had headed downstream.

She realized it was ridiculous to be hiking through a remote canyon in the wilderness with an attaché case. But she needed what was inside and hated the idea of littering a

pristine canyon by leaving the case behind. So she carried it. It didn't weight that much anyhow.

Meanwhile, the parachute was about twenty pounds. Milana could have gone faster without it, but she had figured the ropes might come in handy if she had to descend another steep drop—and she had known she would definitely need the silk, come nighttime.

In the heat of the summer, when it could often be well over a hundred degrees in southern Utah, slot canyons were wonderful places to hike. They were cool and had water, and the rock formations were often dazzlingly beautiful. While the sun had been out, Milana had found the hike enjoyable—although she was also thrilled to have escaped the CIA in one piece. A few times, she'd heard a helicopter whirring overhead, relatively close to the ground. It might have been the CIA—or it might have merely been a sightseeing flight. She didn't try to find out. Instead, she'd ducked under rocky outcrops so that she couldn't be seen, not daring to even take a peek, lest some eagle-eyed pilot happened to be looking her way. Each time, she had listened to the helicopter circle above, then waited for the sound to fade into the distance before daring to emerge again.

Then, just after it got dark, she had come to the pool.

The small creek at the bottom of the canyon suddenly swelled, filling the canyon from wall to wall. Milana had no idea how deep it might be. If it had been daylight, she would have waded through it without hesitation. If it got too deep to wade, then she could swim. But she didn't want to get soaking wet before nightfall. There would be no way to dry out, and she'd end up with hypothermia. So she had no choice but to make camp until morning. She took the silk from the parachute and cocooned herself in it. It wasn't a very thick material, but it held her body heat in well enough to keep her reasonably warm, and there was enough of it to make a decently comfortable bed on the rocky ground. The parachute had come with a survival kit built into the harness: There was a mirror and a flashlight to signal for help, along with a fire-starting kit. Unfortunately, there was nothing to set on fire in the canyon; no plants grew down there.

The attaché case had locked when she had closed it on the plane. In the light of her flashlight, she picked the lock to get it open again.

It took an hour, but then, she didn't have anything else to do.

She recovered the passports, phones, and cash the CIA had confiscated, then examined the classified documents Arthur Zell had sent to Ford and Theodorakis, along with the ones being sent to the warden at Black Sands. They detailed how Milana and Dante were to be delivered to Black Sands upon their capture, but that there was to be no official record of their incarceration. Meanwhile, Charlie Thorne was supposed to be brought directly to Zell himself.

Milana reset the codes on the case so that she wouldn't need to pick the locks again, then closed it and used it as a pillow. It wasn't soft, but it was still better than a rock.

She nestled in her silken cocoon and tried to get some rest.

She hoped that she didn't have much farther to go in the slot canyon before she reached civilization, but, no matter what, she was in for a long day.

THIRTY-TWO

The Great Barrier Reef Queensland, Australia

Charlie Thorne had found that, quite often in life, things she was excited about didn't live up to her expectations.

On the other hand, the Great Barrier Reef defied them.

It was far better than she had imagined. Even from the surface, it was beautiful; the radiant colors of the coral shimmered in the clear blue water. But once Charlie strapped on her scuba gear and dropped over the side of the boat, she found herself in a world of stunning beauty. Even though she was still concerned about Milana, she was awed and amazed by her surroundings.

Cook's map proved to be incredibly accurate. Although coral reefs were living things, they didn't grow quickly enough to change radically over two hundred years. The scuba boat had depth finders and other imaging devices that helped them track down the spot marked by the *X* in "exceptionally" on Cook's map: a small reef surrounded by a dozen others.

The reef rose up on a seamount from the sandy ocean floor. It was about sixty feet tall. At the top, it came to within only a few feet of the surface; Charlie could have just as easily snorkeled above it, but with the scuba gear, she could glide low above the reef, searching the remarkable variety of corals. There were hard corals in formations that looked like elk horns or brains, as well as soft corals that looked like feathers or fans, undulating in the water. And everywhere, there was life: great schools of trout and yellowfin; forests of flowerlike anemones with clownfish nestled in their tentacles; multicolored angelfish and blue tangs and gobies darting among the corals; collections of mollusks and iridescent giant clams. Where the reef dropped off, there were bigger species like parrotfish and grouper, whitetip reef sharks and manta rays. To her delight, Charlie spotted a few sea turtles and a blue-ringed octopus.

And yet, her joy was tinged with sorrow. Charlie knew the Great Barrier Reef—and coral reefs all over the world—was dying. Climate change was warming the oceans, threatening the reefs, which couldn't migrate to cooler waters. Charlie had heard that many parts of the Great Barrier Reef were suffering from what was known as "bleaching," where the coral turned white due to stress. Luckily, this one appeared to have remained healthy, but Charlie had the sad sense that she was witnessing a wonder of nature that might be gone in a generation. It made her want to linger there as long as possible.

But she wasn't there to sightsee. She had a mission.

The problem was she didn't know exactly what she was looking for. She guessed that whatever Cook had left there was probably in some sort of protective case, but there was no way to know for sure. So all she and the others could do was swim around, looking for something that seemed out of the ordinary, hoping that they were actually in the right location.

Even a small coral reef had thousands of places where something could be hidden, but Charlie figured she might be able to narrow the search down. The object would most likely be close to the surface. Back in Cook's day, scuba gear hadn't existed, so anything left more than ten feet down would have been nearly impossible to locate and retrieve.

The case would most likely be made of glass. Salt water was detrimental to many materials. Metal would rust and corrode. Wood would rot or be eaten by sea creatures. But glass would last for centuries. Marine archaeologists had found plenty of intact bottles lost by Greek and Roman sailors thousands of years earlier. So if Cook wanted to guarantee that something would be safe on the reef for centuries, putting it in a bottle was a good idea.

Then, it would probably be big enough to see easily. Cook had gone through a great deal of trouble to bring it all the way to the other side of the world; in theory, only someone the Royal Society had sent would come looking for it. So she hoped it would be relatively easy to find.

However, Cook probably had never imagined that, one day, the Great Barrier Reef might not be so remote anymore, that the far-flung land of Australia would be home to over twenty-five million people—or that snorkeling or scuba diving around a reef would be something that people would pay to do. The ability to swim was surprisingly rare in Cook's time. Even Cook, who had spent more than half his life on ships, couldn't swim. But swimming was obviously commonplace now. So it was possible that, at some point, snorkelers or divers had stumbled across whatever had been hidden here and taken it. Charlie crossed her fingers that, with thousands of larger reefs in the area, this one had been overlooked.

But after an hour of searching, she still hadn't found anything. And neither had the others. Charlie grew worried. Had they misinterpreted the map? Or any of the other clues? Or was it possible that Cook had somehow marked the wrong place?

And then she saw it. An anomaly in the reef. A delicate curve among all the jagged coral. A large, dark blue glass jug, about the size of a gallon of milk, sat five feet below the surface. Two hundred years before, it might have rested atop the reef, but in the following centuries coral had arched over it, sand had settled on it, and mollusks had colonized it, so it was now nearly invisible. But it was definitely man-made.

Dante was swimming close by. Charlie signaled to him to join her, then dove down to inspect the jug. It was still in good shape. Charlie lifted it free from its resting place and brought it to the surface. She could feel something sliding around inside it, knocking against the glass.

Dante swam over to her, excitement in his eyes. Treading water, he removed his scuba mouthpiece so that he could speak. "Is that it?"

Charlie pointed to an inscription near the base of the jug: *Wm. Foster & Sons, London.*

1768. "Looks like it."

Dante grinned. "This jug probably was made to hold rum. The Royal Navy drank plenty of it."

They swam across the surface to the scuba boat. By now, the others had noticed they had found something, and even Khatti had grown excited.

Charlie hauled herself out onto the stern of the boat and pried off her swim fins while the captain removed her scuba tank.

The jug was capped with a rubber stopper, which had then been sealed in place with melted wax to prevent water from getting in. It was still so secure that the captain needed to use a diving knife to cut the wax off. Dante then pried the cork out of the jug, releasing a gust of stale air.

He and Charlie shared a look of anticipation, and then he upended the jug. A brass key slid out of the mouth, into his hand. It looked brand new, having been protected from the elements for two centuries.

Charlie held up the small safe that John Harrison had built and pointed to the second keyhole. "I guess that goes here."

Dante tried the key. It fit perfectly.

A second compartment in the safe swung open. There was a piece of parchment inside.

Khatti grabbed it before either Charlie or Dante could.

"Hey!" Charlie shouted. "Not cool!"

"This is the property of the US government," Khatti informed her coldly.

"I don't think that was Newton's intent," Dante growled.

Khatti ignored him, unfolding the parchment to read it for herself. Her moment of triumph quickly faded, and her face clouded with frustration.

"What's wrong?" Dante asked.

Khatti simply handed him the parchment.

Dante took one look at it and sighed. "Oh no."

THIRTY-THREE

Washington, DC

Arthur Zell sat in the darkness in his apartment, unable to sleep, thinking about how Charlie Thorne had ruined his life.

Becoming director of the CIA had been a dream come true for him. It gave him more clout, power, and influence than almost anyone else in the government. And yet, he had barely even had time to settle in before Thorne began causing him trouble.

Zell blamed his predecessor for getting him into this mess. Jamilla Carter had approved Dante Garcia's impetuous plan for recruiting Thorne in the first place. That had resulted in disaster. Instead of the CIA controlling Pandora, a thirteen-year-old girl did.

Zell had taken what he believed were the right steps to control that mess, but things had backfired in the worst way possible. So he had put Varsha Khatti on the case—and once again, nothing had gone right. Her team had managed to apprehend Milana Moon, but somehow she had escaped. From a jet plane in flight, no less. Now she was at large somewhere in southwestern Utah.

Meanwhile, things had gone sideways with Thorne and Garcia as well. Thorne had allowed an unknown enemy to steal information pertaining to Newton's discovery. So rather than being on their way back to CIA headquarters, Khatti and her targets were off the grid on the Great Barrier Reef.

It seemed to Zell that, no matter what he did to try to control Charlie Thorne, the situation only got worse, and he worried that was going to happen yet again. He rued the day he had ever heard of Charlie Thorne. In the brief time since that had happened, he had developed ulcers so bad that he could barely eat. His hair was falling out. He couldn't sleep. He had expected that being director of the CIA would be stressful, but he had never imagined that so much trouble would come at the hands of a thirteen-year-old girl.

Something had to be done about her. This was no longer only about keeping Pandora safe. It was about making sure that Zell and his promising career weren't brought down by a kid who was younger than his dog.

Zell had spent much of the night brooding and plotting. Now he had a new plan to deal with Charlie Thorne. It was risky, but he could see no other way out of his situation.

Despite the early hour, he made a phone call. There was always someone standing by to put his orders into action.

Then he initiated his new strategy to deal with Charlie Thorne once and for all.

THIRTY-FOUR

Zion National Park

Milana woke early. The sky was just beginning to lighten above, but it was still dark inside the canyon. Her stomach growled in hunger, but there was nothing she could do about that. The sculpted stone walls of the canyon were beautiful, but as devoid of life as any place Milana had ever been.

Although she was antsy to keep moving, she forced herself to wait. Even with the sun coming up, it was still cold in the canyon. Too cold to swim. Milana bided her time until finally the sun was high enough that a few rays slanted down through the gap above.

She stripped down to her underwear, tucked her clothes and the silk parachute into the parachute pack to keep them dry, then lifted the pack and the attaché case above her head and entered the pool of water.

It was so cold, it sent a shock through her body. But there was no other way out. Milana descended into the pool and worked her way across it as quickly as she could. It never got so deep that she had to swim, but it still came up to her chin. By the time she reached the other side, she was shivering violently. She found a spot where sunlight shone into the canyon, dried herself off with the parachute silk and put her clothes back on. Between the dry clothes and the sun, the warmth came back to her body. She hoisted the pack onto her back and continued down the canyon.

There were two more deep pools she had to wade through. And a small waterfall to descend. For the latter, she rigged a rappelling system with the ropes and harness again.

Beyond that, the going was relatively easy, and the scenery was stunning. Despite the circumstances, Milana felt slightly disappointed when she heard voices ahead and realized she was returning to civilization.

The slot canyon fed into a larger canyon at the upper end of the Virgin River. This was an extremely popular hiking route in Zion known as the Narrows. The river filled the canyon but was rarely more than a few inches deep; most hikers waded the length of it in rubber river shoes or sandals. Even early in the morning in autumn, there were huge crowds of people heading upstream.

Milana was the only person going the other direction. The cold water quickly soaked through her shoes and saturated her socks, chilling her feet, but after about half a mile, the canyon widened enough to allow for a paved hiking path to run alongside the river, so Milana took off her wet things and finished the trail barefoot.

The Narrows could only be accessed by shuttle bus. One pulled into the depot just as Milana arrived. Dozens of eager hikers poured off it. Milana was the sole rider heading

back.

She rode the shuttle through the canyon to the park lodge. Once there, she took the important documents, credit cards, and phones from the attaché case, then tossed the case and the parachute in a dumpster. Milana went to the gift shop, bought herself a souvenir Zion T-shirt, dry socks, and a backpack, then went to the café and ordered a huge breakfast.

After that, she took another shuttle to the park entrance. The large parking lot was full; desperate tourists were circling it, hoping for the miracle of a parking space. Milana watched a couple luck out, arriving just as someone else was leaving. The couple parked and quickly left their vehicle, toting heavy backpacks and hiking poles; Milana figured they were going to be gone for several hours, at least. The line for the shuttle alone was thirty minutes.

Milana stole their car. She felt bad about it, but she figured that the CIA would be watching the car rental agencies and tracking anyone hiring ride shares. However, they couldn't police every single car in southern Utah.

It was a two-hour drive to Las Vegas. Milana left the stolen car with five thousand others in a casino parking garage, then headed inside.

She found the casino unsettling. After spending the night alone in a place so remote and quiet the evening before, it was strange to be indoors with thousands of other people. The noise was relentless: talking and cheering, the whistles and clangs of the slot machines. Milana was sure that she had ditched the CIA, but she still couldn't shake the feeling that any one of the people around her might be an agent closing in. At the check-in desk, she showed her fake passport, paid cash for a room and headed upstairs.

Once inside, away from the crowds, she relaxed a bit—but not completely. She had avoided a lifetime of prison, and she had fake IDs and enough cash to get a plane ticket anywhere she wanted to go, but there were still many things to take care of. Varsha Khatti had Dante and Charlie. Milana didn't even know where they were, and seeing as she had their phones, she had no way to get directly in touch with them.

But there was something she could do. It was risky, but there was no time to play things safe.

Milana spread all the classified documents she had recovered out on her bed and went to work.

THIRTY-FIVE

The Great Barrier Reef

Newton's discovery had been moved.

Charlie reread the note that had been locked in the safe as the scuba boat raced back toward Cooktown.

Sept 1781

The Royal Society of London has deemed that the original site for hiding Newton's discovery was no longer safe, and so the Honorable Captain James Cook was engaged once again to move it to a place even more remote.

Notched, a lacerated rock incites nestling. In

Which I place thine implement to prove postulate.

The same code that had led them to Rosser Reef had obviously been used to give the new hiding place. They didn't have phone service out on the reef, but as soon as they got closer to land, they would be able to pinpoint the location. Even so, Charlie was still frustrated.

Dante was doing even worse. He sat beside her in the bow, looking despondent. He hadn't spoken since recovering the note. Instead, he had just stared out at the horizon.

"I'm sure Milana is okay," Charlie said, hoping she sounded reassuring. "She's tough. She can handle anything."

"Well, we're not helping her much." Dante took the note from Charlie. "None of this makes any sense. Why would the Royal Society decide this place wasn't safe anymore?" He waved to the reef around them and the Australian coast on the horizon. "In 1781, this was as remote as you could get. Even now, this is one of the least populated places on the planet. Cooktown has fewer people than a lot of high schools in America. No one found this key over the past two centuries. That hiding place seemed perfectly fine to me."

"Me too." Charlie glanced back to see if Khatti, Wexler, or any of the crew was within earshot. Wexler had been hit by a bout of seasickness and was throwing up over the stern. Khatti was talking to the captain, and the crew was stowing the air tanks. Charlie figured the roar of the motors and the wind would cover up anything she said. "But the society's reasoning must have been solid. I mean, they got Cook to come back out of retirement to do this."

Dante gave her a curious look. "How do you figure that?"

Charlie pointed to the date on the letter. “This was written *after* Cook’s third voyage. There have always been questions about why he agreed to make that trip. He had already done plenty for his country. On his first two voyages, he explored more of the earth than any other man who had lived. He had claimed an entire continent for England. He had earned the right to a safe and peaceful life—and the navy agreed. They made him captain at the Royal Hospital for sailors in Greenwich, which guaranteed him a good salary and a house. He could have spent the rest of his life in comfort with his wife and children, who he’d barely even seen over the past decade. But then, only a few months later, he agreed to go sail around the world again. Why?”

“Maybe he realized he didn’t like his wife and children very much.”

Charlie punched Dante in the shoulder. “I’m serious.”

“So am I. Lots of people don’t like their families.”

Charlie wasn’t sure if this was a comment about her or their father. She chose to ignore it. “The general consensus is that Cook just wasn’t happy when he wasn’t at sea. His country wanted someone to go look for the mythical Northwest Passage that led from the Pacific to the Atlantic, and he believed he could find it.” She held up the note again. “But this indicates something else was in play. And it was obviously top secret, because there’s no record of Cook coming to Australia on his third voyage.”

Dante nodded in agreement. “It wouldn’t have been easy to cover something like that up, but it could have been done. Especially in the 1780s. They didn’t have GPS back then. The only way to track where a ship went was the ship’s logs, and those could have been faked. Then they’d just have to bribe the crew to keep their mouths shut. Did you know that Cook’s wife burned all of their correspondence after he died?”

Charlie’s eyes went wide in surprise. “Really? That’s weird.”

“It is. I mean why do that?”

“I didn’t mean it was weird that she burned their correspondence. It’s weird that you knew something I didn’t. I don’t think that’s ever happened before. This must be one of the happiest days of your life.”

Dante smiled despite himself. “I know plenty of things that you don’t, wise guy.”

“Like what?”

“I figured out the whole X-marks-the-spot thing on Cook’s map before you did.”

Charlie lowered her eyes. “Er... not exactly.”

Dante groaned. “You knew it before I said it?”

“Of course. ‘X marks the spot’? That’s the first rule of being a pirate. Anyone who has ever read *Treasure Island* knows that.”

“Then why didn’t you say anything?”

“I thought I ought to let you look good in front of Agent Khatti.”

Dante considered Charlie for a moment, then shook his head and sighed. “You know, it’s not easy being the big brother to the smartest person on earth.”

Charlie grinned at him. “You think it’s easy being your little sister?”

“I suppose not.” Dante suddenly went on the alert. He glanced behind him.

Charlie looked back and saw Agent Khatti was approaching.

Khatti held up her phone. “I’ve got cell service. We have a match for those coordinates.

It's a place called Kealakekua Bay on—"

"The Big Island of Hawaii," Dante finished.

Khatti looked to him, intrigued. "You know about it?"

"If you know about James Cook, you know about Kealakekua Bay," Dante replied. "It's a strange place for him to leave something as important as Newton's discovery."

"Why's that?"

"Because Cook died there. In a skirmish with the natives."

Khatti reacted to this with surprise, then glanced back at her phone.

Dante whispered to Charlie, "Looks like I can impress Khatti without your help."

Charlie was watching Khatti closely. The agent seemed very upset about something. Charlie thought that she might have just received some bad news.

"Have you heard anything about Milana?" she asked.

Khatti didn't answer the question. Instead, she said, "Hawaii is a ten-hour flight from here. We're leaving as soon as we get back. I'll expect a full briefing on this Kealakekua place on the flight." Without waiting for a response, she headed back toward the stern.

Charlie hopped to her feet and followed her.

Wexler was no longer vomiting, but only because it appeared he had nothing left inside to throw up. He looked terrible, clinging to the railing, as white as bleached coral.

Khatti turned to Charlie, appearing annoyed by her presence. "What do you want?"

"Arthur Zell is lying to you," Charlie stated. "Dante and Milana haven't done anything wrong. Zell's the bad guy here. I have his emails to prove it."

Khatti gave her a severe look. "And where would you have gotten those?"

"Off his computer. I hacked it. You really should look at them before you do anything that puts Dante or Milana in trouble. I uploaded them to a secure site in the cloud. All I need is a computer with a Wi-Fi connection, and I can download them for you to see...."

"I have no interest in looking at a bunch of doctored emails."

"You really think I could fake classified emails from the director of the CIA?"

"It's easier to believe than the idea that you could hack his computer."

"I've hacked things a lot harder to get into than that. The CIA's encryption was surprisingly basic, given that it's supposed to be an intelligence agency."

"You realize you're claiming to have committed a crime? In addition to all the other ones you've committed."

"I only committed this crime to *prove* that I hadn't committed the others. And I sent that proof to other people in the government. But they covered it up. And now they're making you do their dirty work."

Khatti's stare hardened. It was obvious she didn't appreciate Charlie telling her that she was being used. "You realize how far-fetched all this sounds?"

"Let me show you the emails, and then you can decide for yourself."

"They don't matter. I have my orders."

"You know who else blindly followed orders without questioning their morality? The Nazis."

Charlie expected that Khatti would get even angrier, but instead, the agent turned away, looking wounded. "We're here," she said.

The scuba boat was approaching the small dock in Cooktown. The captain slowed the engine so that they wouldn't create a wake and jostle the few other boats moored there.

The afternoon thunderstorms were coming. The captain had been right about timing: Dark clouds were quickly shrouding the sunny, clear skies of the morning.

Since it was the off-season, there weren't many people about. Charlie noted an elderly couple walking along the road by the pier, a pair of tourists who seemed to be wandering aimlessly in search of something to do...

And one other person, lurking on the porch of a hotel across the street. Charlie couldn't make out the face, but she recognized the silhouette. She'd seen it before. Twice. At the Tower of London and St. Paul's Cathedral.

The mysterious person who had been following her before had found her again.

THIRTY-SIX

Look!” Charlie shouted, pointing at the mysterious figure.

The person appeared to recognize they had been spotted. They ducked inside the hotel before anyone could even turn to see what Charlie was talking about.

“What is it?” Dante asked, staring blankly at the empty road.

“There was someone following us in London, and now they’re here,” Charlie told him. She hadn’t mentioned the mysterious figure before, fearing that Dante would be dismissive—which was exactly how he responded now.

“That’s not possible,” he said.

Charlie looked to Agent Khatti, who appeared equally disdainful. Wexler was simply focused on getting off the boat.

The scuba boat was pulling alongside the pier. Charlie leapt ashore, then sprinted toward town.

Dante came after her—and Khatti followed both of them.

“Charlie!” Dante yelled. “What are you doing?”

“I’m going to find this person!” she shouted back.

“Both of you, stop!” Khatti ordered, but Charlie ignored her—and so Dante did too.

“This is the sort of behavior that got Milana captured!” he warned. “We need to think this through!”

“There’s no time for that!” Charlie understood Dante’s concern, and she knew her impulsiveness had gotten them into trouble before, but she didn’t want to lose track of the mysterious figure again.

The storm clouds arrived with surprising speed. Their shadow raced down the street, turning daylight into dusk within seconds.

Charlie darted across the dusty road to the hotel. It was one of the nicer buildings in Cooktown—although it didn’t have much competition in that category. It looked like a remnant from the British colonial days, a two-story wooden building with porches wrapping around both floors.

Charlie barged through the door into the lobby, which was also the bar. This turned out to be where all the people in town were. Even though it was barely lunchtime, the bar was crowded with locals, some of whom looked as though they rarely left. The walls were decorated with wildlife that had been killed and stuffed: mostly the heads of saltwater crocodiles, a few of which were more than two feet long.

However, there was no sign of the mystery person.

“Did a stranger just come through here?” Charlie asked.

The bartender simply pointed to the back of the building.

Charlie ran that way. A hall led into a courtyard with a swimming pool ringed by hotel rooms. The pool was surrounded with tropical plants, creating a thick wall of foliage. On the far side of it, Charlie caught a glimpse of a silhouette clambering over the rear fence.

"Hey!" she yelled.

The person glanced her way, but their features were hidden behind all the plants. Then they dropped to the other side of the fence.

Charlie sprinted around the pool. Only two tourists were there; they had been sunbathing but were now gathering their things quickly before the rain began. Charlie weaved through them, bashed her way through the foliage, and scrambled over the fence herself.

She dropped into an alley behind the hotel. Piles of trash were stacked there, waiting to be picked up. In the United States, there might have been raccoons rooting through it.

Here, there was a cassowary.

It was the biggest bird Charlie had ever seen. It was taller than she was and built rather like its cousin, the ostrich, with a thick round body set atop two powerful legs. It had a long, bright blue neck with a large red turkey wattle, and it sported a tall bony crest atop its head. It looked up from devouring some overripe bananas and glared at Charlie with surprising menace for a bird.

Beyond it, at the end of the alley, the mysterious figure was disappearing around the corner of the hotel. Charlie only caught a fleeting glimpse of them, and due to the storm clouds, they were shrouded in shadow. She noted what she thought was long gray hair peeking out from beneath their hat, although the figure was moving with the speed and agility of a young person.

Charlie went after them. She knew it was never a good idea to run past a large animal that felt threatened—and she knew cassowaries could do serious harm to humans—but she had no other choice. The cassowary made a feint at her, flapping its stubby wings, but once she was past, it returned to its bananas.

Then Dante came over the fence. He yelped in surprise when he saw the cassowary. The bird was now fully agitated. It squawked at him and blocked his way, forcing him to stop.

At the far end of the alley, Charlie turned onto the street.

On the corner were a grocery, a liquor store, and a cheap souvenir shop. Charlie suspected the mysterious figure had ducked into one of them, but she didn't have a chance to figure out which.

Because Kenji Yataro was standing right in her path.

THIRTY-SEVEN

Agent Khatti came over the hotel fence to find Dante facing down the cassowary. Startled by the enormous bird, she shrieked in terror and backed away. “What on earth is that thing?”

“I think it’s a cassowary,” Dante said.

“Are they dangerous?”

“This is Australia. *Everything’s* dangerous.”

At the end of the alley, there was a sudden scream from Charlie.

Dante and Khatti shared a look of concern, then ran that way as fast as they could. The cassowary screeched and chased after them. Dante was worried it might stab them with its beak, but it backed off after a while and returned to the garbage.

Dante and Khatti arrived at the street just in time to see Kenji Yataro bundling Charlie’s unconscious body into a van. Block was at the wheel. He flashed a malicious grin as he gunned the engine and sped away.

Dante raced to the corner. A pair of hunters had just parked their pick-up truck in front of the hotel. It was jacked up on huge all-terrain tires and coated with red dust and dried mud.

“I need your truck,” Dante told the driver.

The driver was a head taller than Dante. He flexed his muscles and challenged, “Try and take it.”

Dante dropped him with a single punch, then stole his keys.

The other hunter started to come to his aid, but Khatti grabbed him from behind and flung him over the hood of a parked car. Then she slipped into the passenger seat beside Dante. “I don’t usually condone this sort of action against civilians,” she said.

“It’s an emergency, and they didn’t look like they were going to listen to reason.” Dante backed the truck into the road, then floored the gas and took off after the van.

The bad guys had a big lead, and there was little to slow them down on the empty roads of Cooktown.

However, there were several hunting rifles in a rack along the back window of the truck.

Khatti lifted one off as Dante raced through the town.

“Don’t do anything that could hurt Charlie,” Dante warned.

“I’ll be careful,” Khatti assured him.

Ahead of them, the road bent around a large, empty lot. Dante cut through it. The truck jounced across the grassy, rutted ground and then picked up the paved road again.

Khatti gave Dante a wary glance. “You should be careful too.”

"They've got my sister." Dante didn't take his eyes off the van ahead of them.

The road ran straight for a while, through empty fields and stands of eucalyptus trees. Dante pushed the truck as fast as it could go.

The sky was now cloaked with dark clouds. Fat drops of rain spattered on the windshield.

The van was too far ahead of them for Khatti to get a shot off.

They hurtled along the empty road, passing through the outskirts of Cooktown and along the banks of the Endeavour River.

The rain came down harder, instantly turning the dirt to mud.

The road grew slick. It was dangerous to drive at such a high speed, and yet, Dante didn't let up.

But the van stubbornly stayed the same distance ahead of them.

They raced across a bridge and came to the airstrip.

A private jet idled on the tarmac, ready to fly despite the foul weather. It was bigger and sleeker than the jet the CIA had arrived on, indicating that the owner had plenty of money.

The van crashed through the airport gate and sped onto the tarmac. It parked beside the private jet. Kenji leapt out, carrying Charlie over his shoulder, and scrambled into the plane. Block abandoned the van and followed them.

Dante sped through the remnants of the gate.

The jet's door closed, and the plane began to move down the airstrip.

Dante swerved onto the airstrip behind it. He started to gain ground.

Khatti lowered the truck window and aimed the rifle through it.

Dante suddenly had a terrifying thought. Khatti probably had orders to keep Charlie out of enemy hands at all costs. Which meant she might be willing to take out the entire jet, rather than let the bad guys get away with Charlie.

So Dante hit the brakes and veered to the side just as Khatti fired.

Her shot went wide.

The jet lifted into the air.

Khatti wheeled on Dante angrily. "What were you doing? I could have stopped them!"

"You could have *killed* them," Dante corrected. "We know where they're going. We can catch up to them in Hawaii."

He turned the truck around and headed back toward the CIA's jet.

Just in time to see it explode.

The plane erupted into a ball of fire. Pieces of metal sailed through the storm in every direction.

The enemy's jet vanished into the clouds, whisking Charlie away, leaving Dante behind with no way to follow.

PART FOUR

THE SECRET

To myself I am only a child playing
on the beach, while vast oceans of truth lie undiscovered before me.

—ISAAC NEWTON

THIRTY-EIGHT

Somewhere over the South Pacific

Charlie awoke to find herself sprawled on a leather couch in an office. The couch faced a wooden desk, which appeared to have been custom made. Instead of the boxy design of most desks, this was sleek and rounded. It looked as though it had been carved out of a single piece of wood.

There were other unusual things about the office: It was very narrow, and the walls were curved, as though the room was in a tube. It took a few moments for Charlie to realize why: She was on a plane.

Charlie figured the plane must have been extremely expensive. It was wider and taller than any of the CIA's private jets and was soundproofed so well that she couldn't hear the engines. If it hadn't been for the shape of the room, she would never have known she wasn't on the ground.

The desk had almost nothing on it, which made sense to Charlie. Obviously, this wasn't someone's main office; it would only be used temporarily, while going from one place to another.

A man was seated behind the desk. Even though Charlie had never met the man before, she figured he was related to Kenji. They had several features in common: their eyes, their nose, the shape of their faces. She figured the man was Kenji's grandfather—or maybe his father; rich men often had children who were much younger than them. The man was working on a laptop computer. A cup of tea steamed beside it.

Charlie's wrists and ankles were bound with duct tape, rather than the handcuffs or zip ties a professional law enforcement agency would use. She suspected that her kidnapping had been a split-second decision, and that whoever had captured her had been forced to improvise.

The tracking bracelet that the CIA had put on her wrist was gone. Her captors had removed it somehow.

She sat up on the couch.

The man at the desk stopped typing and gave her a cruel smile. "I suppose this must all be very unsettling for you," he said.

"Not really," Charlie replied. "Honestly, I've been kidnapped quite a lot over the past few months. I'm getting used to it."

The smile faded from the man's face. He seemed upset that Charlie wasn't more intimidated. "Well then, you must be wondering what I want with you."

"You want my help tracking down Newton's discovery. Seeing as every time you guys

have gotten close, I've left you in the dust. Right, Mr. Yataro?"

Yoshi's eyes widened, betraying his surprise. "How do you know who I am?"

"It's not like you keep a low profile. You're the CEO of one of the biggest technology corporations on earth. Your photo is on the homepage of the website."

"Yes, but... I know I'm recognized in the business world. But you're just a girl."

"That's sexist," Charlie observed. "My gender has nothing to do with my ability to be aware of international business tycoons."

"I only meant that you were young."

"Then you should have said 'But you're only a teenager.' But you didn't. You said 'girl.' Which reveals that you have extremely outdated ideas about gender roles—in addition to being a kidnapper. Honestly, you're kind of a jerk."

Yataro stiffened, flummoxed. "What did you just call me?"

"A jerk. I presume people are rarely honest around you, because they're afraid of offending you, but the fact is, you're not a good person. By the way, I'm really hungry. Could you get me something to eat?"

"I am not your servant!" Yataro snapped.

"But you *are* my captor. I'd be happy to get myself something but..." Charlie pointed to her duct-taped ankles. "I can't get around so well. Which is going to be a real problem when I need to go to the bathroom."

Yataro sized up Charlie. He was used to being in command of any situation, but within less than a minute, Charlie had made him defensive and unsettled.

Which was Charlie's intention. Although she had recognized Yoshi Yataro, she didn't know much about him beyond his reputation as a businessman. Still, she could presume that a man in his position was used to being treated with respect and probably would be rattled by anyone who didn't suck up to him. And someone who was rattled was more likely to give up information by accident.

"Look," Charlie said. "It wasn't *my* idea to be held prisoner in your office. That was *your* decision. I'm a human being. I need to eat and drink—and eventually everything I eat and drink is going to come out again. If you want to keep me bound up like this, then you're going to have to help me out."

Yataro sighed, then got up from behind his desk and went to a small refrigerator.

"You're not going to cut me loose?" Charlie asked. "You realize that keeping a teenage girl tied up in your private office makes you look like a pervert, right?"

Yataro wheeled on her angrily. "I am not a pervert!"

"Then why not take off the tape? I can't run away. We're thirty-five thousand feet in the air. Where am I gonna go?"

Yataro removed a wooden bento box from the refrigerator and brought it to Charlie. It was full of carrot sticks and celery.

Charlie frowned. "Do you have anything else? Like chips or candy?"

"I do not eat garbage," Yataro said.

"I do," Charlie replied. "At the very least, do you have any dip? Some ranch dressing would be nice."

"That is what I have. If you're hungry, then eat it."

Charlie plucked out a carrot stick and chewed on it as loud as she could, hoping it would annoy Yoshi.

It did. He cringed at the sound as he returned to his desk and tried to take control of the meeting again. “You were correct that I want your help finding Newton’s discovery. You have proven to be a formidable opponent. So I have recruited you from the CIA so that you can join my team.”

“The problem is I don’t *want* to join your team.”

“I don’t care what you want. You will help me—or I will hurt you.”

“Oh. So in addition to being sexist and a pervert, you now want to add sadist to the list? This is not going to look good for you when the public finds out.”

Anger flared in Yoshi’s eyes. “You think this is all a joke?”

“No, I *know* it’s not a joke. Which is what makes the whole thing so pathetic. Even with all your money and power, you can’t find this discovery on your own, so you have to kidnap me and threaten me with violence to get it.”

“You need to watch your mouth, little girl! You are not as clever as you think! You don’t even know what this discovery of Newton’s is!”

“Of course I do.” Charlie flashed a confident grin. “It’s the secret to eternal life.”

The rage vanished from Yoshi’s eyes and was replaced by astonishment. “How do you know that?”

“It’s simple,” Charlie said. “You just have to know your alchemy.”

THIRTY-NINE

Cooktown, Australia

The remains of the CIA's jet smoldered beside the runway.

Cooktown only had a volunteer fire department: a ragtag group of locals and a thirty-year-old fire engine. It had taken them half an hour to mobilize and get to the airport, by which point, the blaze had nearly run its course. The jet fuel had all burned up, and the afternoon thunderstorm had doused the flames. All that remained of the plane was a charred pile of metal.

Dante watched the smoke from it billow into the sky, feeling overwhelmed with despair.

He had failed the two people he cared most about in the world.

First, he had allowed the CIA to catch Milana. And now, even worse, he had allowed the enemy to capture Charlie.

Despite how angry he had been at Charlie, he knew she was right. It hadn't been her decision to get involved in any of this; it was Dante's. He had dragged her into danger without any preparation. He had turned her world upside down, put her life at risk time and again—and now he had lost her. He didn't even know who had taken her. And while Charlie put up a tough front and had plenty of brains, she was still just a thirteen-year-old girl. She was certainly in way over her head, and there was nothing he could do.

He knew where she was going: Kealakekua Bay. But he had no way to get there quickly. The CIA had requested another jet, but it was hours away. There wasn't even another jet in Cooktown capable of flying to Hawaii that they could commandeer. The only other aircraft at the airport were small propeller craft that wouldn't have even been able to reach New Zealand.

There *had* been another, but it was gone. That was one of the most agonizing things about Dante's situation. The jet had been parked beside one of the hangars, but while Dante and the CIA had been distracted by the explosion of their own plane, the pilot had arrived at the airstrip and flown away. Dante and the CIA hadn't even realized it was happening until the jet was roaring down the runway. It was as if the pilot had realized the CIA might try to seize their plane and was getting away before that could happen.

Now Dante stood at the edge of the runway, feeling useless. Khatti and Wexler were pacing about, talking to the CIA on their phones. Dante had been left to just sit and wait. The others didn't even seem concerned about him escaping. After all, where could he go? He had no car and no plane. Cooktown was surrounded by ocean and swamps filled with crocodiles. Even worse was the underlying message in their ignorance of him: Dante

wasn't important enough to worry about. If he escaped, would it matter? Charlie was the prize. Now that she had been captured, all that mattered to the CIA was getting her back.

That was all that mattered to Dante as well. If he ran, he might be able to save himself, but he couldn't help Charlie. So he decided to stay. He might end up in prison for life, but if he could contribute to Charlie's rescue, it would be worth it.

Volunteer firefighters were still running about. A few small scattered fires continued to burn in the grass around the runway, sparked by flaming bits of debris from the plane. Some of the firefighters were using the hoses on them, while others were simply carrying buckets of water to douse them with.

In all the chaos after the jet had exploded, Dante had pretended to bump into Wexler and subtly picked his pocket. There was \$168 in Wexler's wallet.

Dante approached one of the volunteer firemen and offered him the money in exchange for using his cell phone.

The volunteer eagerly agreed to the deal.

Dante wasn't as adept with memorizing phone numbers as Charlie was, but he had committed a few to memory. He dialed one, listened to the phone ring, and prayed for the person he was calling to answer.

FORTY

Above the South Pacific

Charlie said, “Nowadays, when people talk about the old practice of alchemy, they usually think it was all about dealing with materials. Looking for ways to turn one metal into another, like turning lead into gold.”

Yoshi snorted with disgust. “Harebrained foolishness.”

“True,” Charlie agreed, opting to not share her insights on the subject. “But there were other aspects to alchemy as well, particularly the desire to cure disease and, if possible, find a way that people didn’t die at all. Sometimes, we look back on alchemy like it was ridiculous, but it really did lay the foundations for modern science. Newton was right in the middle of all that, doing his work at the time when alchemy was evolving into biology and chemistry and physics. So it’s entirely possible that, as an alchemist, he was seeking the secret to eternal life. And since he was one of the smartest people who ever lived, I suppose he could have found it.”

“And what leads you to believe that this is the discovery I’m looking for, rather than the ability to turn lead into gold?”

“Well, look at yourself.” Charlie pointed toward Yoshi, which was somewhat awkward, since her wrists were still taped together. “You’ve already got billions of dollars, so creating gold probably isn’t as exciting to you as it would be to other people. Meanwhile, you’re getting on in years—and you seem awfully obsessed with your health.”

“How’s that?”

Charlie did her best imitation of Yoshi. “I do not eat garbage.”

Yoshi bristled. “Many people are careful about what they eat.”

“Yes, but you’re over the top. The only snacks you have in your fridge are carrot sticks and celery. Why? You’re *old*. You can let yourself have a candy bar once in a while—or a soft drink instead of hot tea.”

“I have never had a candy bar or a soda in my life.”

“Really? Haven’t you ever wanted to try one?”

“Of course, but they are terrible for you.”

“This is exactly what I was talking about: obsession with health. Now, I will say it’s working for you. You’re obviously in extremely good shape for a man who is... How old are you, exactly? Eighty?”

“Eighty-eight,” Yoshi said proudly.

Charlie whistled, genuinely impressed. “Wow. You look a good thirty years younger than you actually are....”

“Thank you.”

“... but I’m guessing that’s not good enough for you. I mean, carrot sticks and celery can only do so much. The record for longest-living human is something like a hundred and twenty years.”

“A hundred and twenty-two years and a hundred and sixty-four days.”

“And you want more?”

Yoshi gave her a curious look. “Who wouldn’t want to live forever? That’s been the dream of humanity for as long as we have been aware of our own mortality.”

“Well, not *all* humans. Newton and Cook and the Royal Society went through a lot of trouble to take this discovery as far away as they could.”

“But they also left clues leading to it. So that someday, someone clever and deserving enough could find it again.” Yoshi gave Charlie a curious look. “You don’t seem particularly surprised that the secret to eternal life exists.”

Charlie shrugged. “Plenty of scientists have theorized it’s possible. Maybe not to live forever, but to live for much longer than we do. I mean, there’s tortoises that live two hundred years, and Greenland sharks live almost four hundred. There’s a sea sponge that’s fifteen thousand years old, and a species of jellyfish that can actually reverse its life cycle, so that, in a way, it’s kind of immortal. Humans now live about twice as long as they used to. So it makes sense that we could push the envelope even farther. Maybe by stopping the aging of our cells, or having them repair themselves—or through some other method.”

The faintest trace of a smile crossed Yoshi’s face. “You have done your research.”

“Yes. So I also know there’s a downside to all this.”

Yoshi’s smile faded. “There is no downside to immortality.”

“How about overpopulation? There’s already more than eight billion people on earth. Our planet can barely support all of us now. So what happens when people stop dying? Most likely food shortages, wars for resources, the destruction of the natural world as we know it...”

“That is all true. But I have no intention of sharing this treasure with the rest of the world.”

Charlie nodded. “Right. I forgot you’re not a good person. Well, there’s also a personal downside to living forever.”

Yoshi grew intrigued. But before they could continue the conversation, there was a knock at the office door.

“Grandfather?” Kenji asked from the other side. “Sorry to disturb you, but something has come up.”

“Give me a moment,” Yoshi replied, then got up from behind his desk once again and came to the couch where Charlie sat. He leaned in so that his face was only inches from hers, giving her a menacing stare, and whispered, “No one else knows what Newton’s discovery is, and I want to keep it that way. So don’t say anything about it—if you know what’s good for you. Am I clear?”

The statement left Charlie with plenty of questions, but there was no chance to ask any of them. She merely nodded. “Crystal.”

“Good.” Yoshi pulled away from her and shouted, “Come in!”

The door opened and Kenji entered. His demeanor was far different in front of his grandfather. When Charlie had encountered him before, he had been confident and formidable. Now he was meek and skittish, like a dog that feared it was about to be whipped. “I’m sorry to disturb you.”

Despite the odd circumstances, Yoshi seemed to feel it was important to be polite and introduce everyone. “This is my grandson, Kenji,” he told Charlie.

“We’ve met,” Charlie said. “He’s tried to kill me several times.”

Kenji looked slightly offended. “I wasn’t trying to kill you. I was trying to get the clues to Newton’s discovery.”

“Which you failed at,” Yoshi noted pointedly.

Kenji lowered his head in shame. “I did. But I also captured Charlie.”

He was obviously hoping for praise, but Yoshi didn’t give it to him. Instead, he asked, “What’s so important that you needed to interrupt us?”

Kenji glanced at Charlie, looking wounded. It seemed to Charlie that he might have been jealous; even though Charlie was a prisoner, Yoshi was still treating her with more respect than his own grandson.

“As you know, the final clue is pointing us to Kealakekua Bay,” Kenji reported. “That’s located on the Big Island of Hawaii, which has the volcano of Mauna Loa in the center of it....”

“I am well aware of the geography of Hawaii,” Yoshi said abruptly. “What’s going on?”

“The volcano is erupting.”

FORTY-ONE

Kona, the Big Island of Hawaii

Mount Everest is not the tallest mountain on earth.

Everest reaches higher into the atmosphere than any other mountain: 29,032 feet, which is nearly five and a half miles. However, the base of Everest sits atop the Tibetan plateau, which is already several miles above sea level.

Meanwhile, the base of Mauna Kea, the volcano at the center of the Big Island of Hawaii, is several miles *below* the surface of the ocean. While the peak of Mauna Kea is only 13,802 feet above sea level, the height of the mountain itself, from base to peak, is 33,497 feet, making it nearly a mile taller than Everest.

Mauna Kea is also the *biggest* mountain on earth. Its base, down on the bottom of the sea, is approximately two thousand square miles. The base of Mount Everest is only a fraction of that. Mauna Kea is simply a massive cone of rock.

It is also relatively young, geologically speaking. The Hawaiian Islands have formed as the Pacific tectonic plate rotates counterclockwise over a “hot spot” where lava spews up through the crust of the earth. There are actually 137 islands in Hawaii, in a chain about 1,500 miles long, although most of the state’s population lives on the largest seven islands. Of these, Kauai is the oldest at four million years—while the Big Island is a mere 300,000 years old. Early humans had developed stone tools well before the Big Island formed.

The Big Island is still getting bigger. Lava continues to rise through the hot spot, occasionally breaking through to the surface. Although the popular image of an erupting volcano depicts molten rock spewing from the top, the eruptions on the Big Island have often occurred on the flanks of its volcanoes. The Hawaiian lava tends to flow slowly and then cool, leaving enormous swaths of brand-new rock behind.

Thus, much of the surface of the Big Island is less than a hundred years old. (In fact, a good amount of it is even younger than a fifth grader.) That is too little time for the rock to break down enough to allow plants to take root, so a lot of the island, especially on the western side, is a sea of barren black lava. In some places, the lava is smooth and rippled, like a river, while in others it is jagged and rough, forming bizarre, gnarled formations. There are lava tubes big enough to drive a bus through, vents that release sulfurous smoke, and sites where the lava has swallowed entire communities, leaving buildings and street signs poking out of the rock. (Meanwhile, over on Kauai, four million years has been plenty of time for plants to grow, and the island is covered with lush tropical jungles that thrive in the rich volcanic soil.)

From the jet, Charlie could see the island growing before her eyes. As Kenji had

warned, the volcano was erupting. There were actually two volcanic cones on the Big Island, giving it the look of an enormous partially submerged camel, with only its humps sticking out of the water. Mauna Kea, to the north, was the taller peak, while Mauna Loa, to the south, was only slightly shorter but had been far more volcanically active over the past few hundred years.

A new fissure had torn open in the western side of Mauna Loa, oozing bright orange lava. Multiple streams of it wound down toward the ocean, while a thick column of smoke rose into the otherwise clear blue sky. The molten rock was 2,200 degrees, so hot that it glowed.

Unfortunately, there was a small community in its path: an assortment of local homes, vacation condos, coffee plantations, and restaurants, clustered around the two-lane belt road that ringed the island. A full-scale evacuation was underway. Perched at the airplane window, Charlie could see homes burning, landscaping ablaze, and streets being severed by the river of molten rock. There were roadblocks on the belt road to the north and south, marked by police cars with flashing bubble lights. A dozen helicopters were hovering above like flies at a picnic, though Charlie couldn't tell how many were there to aid the evacuation and how many were merely sightseeing.

To the southwest of the community, in the direct path of the lava, was Kealakekua Bay, an ear-shaped divot in the coast. It had been over a century since the last lava flow there, and a grassy plain led right to its eastern edge, where a thousand-foot cliff plunged into the sea. At the north end of the bay, the ground sloped down to a shore of ragged lava. A small forest grew there, and a white obelisk stood in the center, a monument to James Cook, marking the spot where he had died.

Charlie was alone with Yoshi in his office again. Both were looking out the windows of the plane.

Charlie couldn't tell exactly how fast the lava was flowing but estimated it would reach the cliff edge and plunge into the bay within the next four or five hours. "The police are never going to let us go there," she warned. "They're evacuating everyone from the area."

"We will get there," Yoshi said confidently. Like many exceptionally rich people who Charlie had met, he seemed like he had little experience with people telling him no.

"There's a freaking volcano erupting!" Charlie exclaimed. "Lava is heading right for the monument. The amount of sulfur that's being released into the air is probably toxic."

"That bay could be buried under six feet of new rock by tomorrow," Yoshi told her. "If we don't go today, then Newton's discovery might be lost forever."

"Eternal life isn't worth dying for."

"On the contrary, Miss Thorne, it's *not* helping me that will be deadly. If you don't want to be part of my expedition, then I have no use for you. It is already a great risk for me to be landing here with a prisoner. I might as well just have Kenji toss you out of the plane."

Charlie met Yoshi's gaze. He didn't appear to be bluffing.

"Are you coming or not?" Yoshi asked.

Charlie sighed. "Guess I'll join you."

FORTY-TWO

Kona International Airport The Big Island of Hawaii

The CIA did not have an office in Hawaii. The state was too far removed from most of the world to merit one. However, there was an FBI office on Oahu.

Normally, the FBI and the CIA did not work closely together, but on this day, an exception had been made. A request had come in directly from Arthur Zell himself. A private jet was headed from Cooktown, Australia, to Kona on the Big Island with a kidnapped thirteen-year-old girl aboard. The CIA didn't have the time to get a team out to the airport to intercept the plane and rescue the girl, so they needed help.

Zell had claimed the girl was the daughter of an important foreign politician who couldn't be named for her own safety. The head of the FBI in Oahu suspected this was not the entire story—the CIA never told anyone the entire story—but still, if a teenage girl was in trouble, then something had to be done. Four agents were dispatched to Kona to await the flight's arrival, arrest the kidnappers, and recover the girl.

The Kona airport had been carved into one of the great seas of lava on the west coast of the Big Island. Even though it handled dozens of flights a day, it was still relatively small. There were few buildings. Tourists waited outdoors and boarded their planes on the tarmac.

Even though it was late in the year, the sun was blazing. Heat mirages shimmered on the runways, blurring the view of the ocean beyond them. The faint smell of sulfur wafted through the air. Despite the volcanic activity, flights were still arriving; tourism drove the Hawaiian economy, and most of the resorts were a safe distance from the lava. If anything, *more* tourists than usual were arriving for that time of year. People had jumped on the first plane available to come see the eruption.

The FBI agents arrived on their own jet from Oahu; a plane was a necessity in Hawaii, given the need to island-hop. The jet was over forty years old and had thousands of miles on it. The agents were not undercover. They wanted to look official when they made their arrests, which meant they were the only people in the airport dressed in suits. In fact, they might have been the only people on the entire island dressed that way. Even the airport employees at Kona wore tourist garb: Hawaiian shirts and shorts.

A large section of tarmac to the east of the runway served as a parking lot for private jets. Many extremely wealthy people had vacation homes on the Kona coast; the lot was almost full. The FBI jet parked there, and then the agents exited onto the steaming tarmac.

The jet they were waiting for was due to arrive imminently. They could see it approaching, glinting in the sunlight as it passed the plume of smoke from the volcano.

The agents decided to wait for the jet in the parking area, away from all the tourists and the airport employees. Once the suspects deplaned, the FBI could arrest them without making a scene. The only people around were a few wealthy tourists, headed to their own jet nearby. The tourists appeared to be a group of Japanese businessmen heading home from a golf vacation. All three were on their phones, while three porters lugged their golf clubs and luggage behind them.

The FBI agents were so focused on the incoming jet, none of them paid much attention to the tourists.

Not until one of them said, “Put your hands up.”

The FBI agents turned to discover that the six men were not businessmen and porters at all. And they had not been carrying golf clubs in their bags.

Instead, they had been carrying assault rifles, which were now pointed at the agents.

The agents were outnumbered and outgunned. They were exposed out on the tarmac, with nowhere to run or hide. There was nothing they could do except obey orders.

By the time Yoshi Yataro’s jet landed three minutes later, the men he had hired to neutralize the FBI had done their job admirably. All four agents had been bound with their own zip ties and dragged back aboard their plane.

Charlie Thorne didn’t see any sign of them as she followed Yoshi and Kenji off the jet. She had no idea that Agent Khatti had organized a rescue attempt at all—or that it had failed so spectacularly. Instead, the six men waiting on the tarmac merely appeared to be additional muscle that Yoshi had arranged to meet them in Hawaii.

The six men fell in around Charlie and Yoshi without saying a word. The group headed to where three SUVs waited beside the tarmac. Charlie was bundled inside, and they all set off for Kealahou Bay.

On another jet, two hours west of the Big Island, Agent Khatti received the bad news. It came directly from Zell himself.

Khatti promptly relayed it to Dante, who sat across from her. She felt he had a right to know.

Dante winced as though he’d been punched. “So where’s that leave her?” he asked.

Khatti sighed sadly. “Looks like Charlie’s on her own.”

FORTY-THREE

Kealakekua Bay The Big Island of Hawaii

The monument marking the spot where Captain Cook had died was difficult to access by road on normal days—but now it was impossible due to the police roadblock on the belt road. The easiest way to reach the monument, even when there wasn't an active lava flow, was by boat. So Yoshi Yataro's advanced team had rented a fishing vessel from a marina in Kona. The company had warned that they were not to visit Kealakekua Bay. It was a protected marine sanctuary, off limits to motor craft, but Yoshi had ignored the warning and ordered his men to head south.

At some other time, Charlie figured she would have found the trip enjoyable. The skies were clear, the sea was calm, and they saw several pods of spinner dolphins along their route. But the closer they got to Kealakekua, the more Charlie was overcome by a growing sense of doom. She stood at the bow of the fishing boat, clutching the rail tightly.

As they came along the jagged lava shores to the north of the bay, they could see the glowing streams of lava in the distance, carving their way through the grasslands toward the top of the cliffs.

Charlie turned away from the sight, staring out toward the horizon instead.

"There's no need to be worried." Kenji joined her at the railing. Given how antagonistic their relationship had been, he seemed surprisingly concerned about her. "The lava flow isn't going to affect us. We'll be long gone by the time it reaches the water. And even then, I don't think it would be an issue."

"The lava is the least of my worries," Charlie said. "This place is cursed."

Kenji laughed. "Someone as intelligent as you shouldn't believe in curses."

"Do you know the story of Cook's death?"

"No."

Charlie pointed to the land where the monument stood. "A large Hawaiian community lived here when Cook arrived. One of the biggest in the islands. Until Cook showed up, the Hawaiians had been cut off from the rest of the world for centuries. Cook actually came to Hawaii twice. The first time, he landed on Kauai. He and his men thought this place was paradise, but they had work to do. They went up to Alaska, looking for the Northwest Passage, had a really awful time, and then after about a year, they figured 'to heck with this' and came back down to Hawaii. The second time, they ended up right here.

"They happened to arrive at exactly the right moment. This bay was associated with a powerful Hawaiian God named Lono, and the timing of Cook's arrival, along with his huge ships, seems to have led the Hawaiians to believe that he *was* Lono. His crew reported that a thousand canoes full of natives came out to greet them. Cook was made the center of a great ceremony that fifteen thousand natives attended. He and his men were showered with food and gifts."

"That doesn't sound like a curse at all," Kenji observed. He had been listening intently, and Charlie found herself thinking back to when they had first met at the Wren Library in Cambridge. She'd had fun with him for a while, before he had turned on her, which made her feel that, under other circumstances, they might have been friends.

"Well, it was good for the *British*," she said. "But it turns out, even gods can wear out their welcome. Cook and his men took full advantage of the Hawaiians' hospitality for a month—and eventually, the Hawaiians started to get sick of them. Cook got the message and decided to shove off, but he didn't get far before he hit a storm that broke one of his masts. He had no choice but to limp back here again.

"This time, the Hawaiians were beginning to suspect they'd been scammed. I mean, what kind of god can't keep his own ship afloat? They weren't happy to see the Brits again, and things went downhill fast. There were arguments and fights. And then, one morning, the Hawaiians made off with one of Cook's dinghies.

"Cook snapped. He went ashore with nine men and tried to take one of the chiefs hostage until his boat was returned, which wasn't the smartest plan in the world. Within a few minutes, the British were surrounded by a thousand angry Hawaiians. Someone fired a gun—and next thing you know, Cook and his men were running for their lives. Somewhere right around here, Cook found himself trapped between the ocean and the mob. And he couldn't swim. The mob got him—and that was it."

Kenji gave Charlie a withering glance. "You're freaked out because some British imperialist got killed here over two hundred years ago?"

Charlie responded with a look that was equally withering. "The real tragedy that took place here wasn't Cook's death. It was what followed." She pointed back to the shoreline. "Where's that Hawaiian community now?"

Understanding descended on Kenji. "It's gone."

"Exactly. Cook's arrival here—just like in Australia and so many other places—was the beginning of the end for the natives. Historians think there were at least two hundred and fifty thousand Hawaiians living in these islands when Cook showed up. Maybe as many as a million. Less than a hundred years later, there were less than seventy thousand. The culture of the South Pacific covered more of the earth than any human empire before it—and only a few generations after Cook, it was gone."

Kenji stared at the north shore of Kealakekua, now seeming unsettled as well. "I guess this place *is* kind of cursed."

"Yeah. Plus, I'm kind of bummed because your grandfather's going to kill me after I help him find Newton's discovery."

Kenji shifted his gaze to Charlie. "No he won't."

"He doesn't strike me as the kind of guy who likes to share."

“He’s not evil. He’s just”—Kenji paused to choose his words carefully—“determined to get what he wants.”

“He said he’d have me thrown out of the jet if I didn’t help find this discovery.”

“He wouldn’t have really done that. He...” Kenji paused once again. “He respects you.”

“But not *you*. Despite everything you do for him.”

Charlie was just guessing, based on the interactions she had observed between Yoshi and Kenji, but Kenji’s dejected look confirmed she was right.

“I don’t deserve his respect. I have failed him repeatedly.”

“*Everyone* deserves respect. Especially from their grandparents. Face it, the guy’s a tool.”

“He’s not.”

“You shouldn’t let him treat you that way.”

Kenji didn’t respond. Instead, he turned away from Charlie and checked their location on his phone.

They were now inside the bay. Charlie looked down into the water. It was so clear that she could see schools of fish darting about the reef several stories below.

The monument to Cook loomed ahead of them, a thirty-foot-tall white obelisk that stood out dramatically against the dark black lava on which it stood.

“The coordinates you found match the location of that monument,” Kenji reported.

“Kenji!” Yoshi yelled from behind them, and his grandson stiffened at the sharp tone of his voice. “It’s time to go ashore!”

“Yes, sir.” Kenji looked at Charlie sadly, as though he was upset their time together had come to an end, then went to join his grandfather.

Since motorized boats weren’t allowed in the marine reserve, there was no place to dock near the monument. Yoshi’s men would have to bring the boat to shore to let people disembark, then pull away and idle in the bay. This promised to be a tricky maneuver: Even with the calm seas, the waves still crashed against the jagged rocks.

But there was no other way ashore, and as Kenji had noted, his grandfather was determined. As they pulled closer, Yoshi stood at the rail on the port side of the boat, his eyes aglow with excitement.

Kenji came to his side. “Let me go ashore first,” he said in Japanese, “so I can help you.”

“I’m not a child!” Yoshi snapped. “I can do this myself!”

Kenji withdrew, chastened, then glanced at Charlie to see if she had understood.

She had. “See what I mean?” she mouthed to him.

The boat came alongside the rocks. Yoshi waited for a moment, then timed his jump just right, gracefully leaping ashore. He looked back at Kenji defiantly.

Kenji followed, although he rushed his jump, not timing it as well. He stumbled as he landed, scraping his hands and knees.

Yoshi gave him a disapproving look, then pointed to Charlie and yelled to his men. “Now her!”

Two of the men grabbed Charlie’s arms and dragged her to the side of the boat.

“Hey!” she shouted, struggling against them. “I can handle this!”

The men didn’t listen.

A wave caught the boat, banging it into the lava. There was a screech of metal on rock that made Charlie wince.

The men threw her ashore. She had no way to time her landing and fell forward on the rough stone, which cut her palms and her legs.

“Bring her!” Yoshi ordered Kenji.

Kenji hurried to Charlie’s side, but she got to her feet quickly, just as determined as Yoshi to show that she did not need help.

Kenji grabbed her arm to make sure she didn’t run, then dragged her along. She struggled against him, but his grip was too tight, so she gave up. Even if she could break free, it would be almost impossible to flee across the uneven lava—and there was no place for her to go. She would just end up trapped by her enemies, the same way that James Cook had been over two centuries before. True, she could swim, but that wouldn’t do her much good. The rest of Yoshi’s men had remained aboard the fishing boat, blocking any chance of her escape by sea.

While it was tricky to jump from the boat to shore, Charlie suspected the main reason Yoshi’s men had stayed aboard was that Yoshi didn’t want them around when he found Newton’s discovery. The old man hadn’t even told his own grandson about what he was after, so he was obviously determined to keep it a secret. Plus, he probably figured that he didn’t need the extra muscle to keep Charlie in line; Kenji could do the job himself. Charlie knew she couldn’t beat Kenji in a fight. And sadly, there didn’t seem to be anyone around who could come to her aid. Normally, there would have been other tourists at the site; they would have walked down from the belt road or kayaked across the bay. But today, thanks to the lava and the police-mandated evacuations, no one was here but them.

Charlie would have to figure her way out of this by herself.

FORTY-FOUR

Yoshi strode briskly across the rough lava, leading the way to the Cook Monument. The white obelisk had been erected atop a wide rectangular platform made of black volcanic rock. As they got closer, Charlie noticed that the obelisk had been defaced with graffiti. In black spray paint, someone had written *Haoles go home* on it. Charlie had learned that “haole” was a traditional Hawaiian term for an outsider, particularly a white person. Apparently, some of the locals didn’t appreciate a monument to Cook on their sacred land, which Charlie felt was entirely understandable.

An inscription was etched into the base of the obelisk, dated from 1874. It read: *In memory of the great circumnavigator, Captain James Cook, R. N., who discovered these islands on the 18th of January, A.D. 1778 and fell near this spot on the 14th of February, A.D. 1779.* Although someone had crossed out the word “discovered” and written “desecrated.”

Yoshi stopped at the base of the obelisk and looked around in frustration. Then he shifted his attention to Charlie. “We’re at the right place. What am I supposed to do now?”

“I don’t know,” Charlie admitted.

Yoshi’s stare hardened. “I thought you were supposed to be some sort of genius.”

“I don’t have any more information here than you do, Just the coordinates for this place. It’s not like Newton is magically communicating with me from his grave.”

“If you can’t help me, then you are of no use to me,” Yoshi warned.

Charlie was torn. She feared that if didn’t help Yoshi, he might have her killed. And yet, if she helped him, the moment he had Newton’s discovery, he might kill her as well. She actually found herself hoping that they would merely come upon yet another clue, leading them somewhere else, which would give her more time to engineer an escape, but she didn’t think that would happen. Several factors led her to believe that this was the final resting place of Newton’s discovery. So all she could think to do was stall.

She turned toward the ocean. The fishing boat had pulled away from the shore and retreated to the calmer water. Charlie considered the ocean around it and figured that, maybe, getting everyone into the water would give her a chance to escape. “In Australia, the clue was hidden in a glass jug in the reef. There’s a good chance that might have been done here, too.”

“No,” Kenji said. “This reef was a popular fishing ground for the native Hawaiians at the time. And it’s not that large. Anything Cook or his men hid down there would have been found quickly.”

Charlie turned to him, frustrated that he’d countered her argument, while

simultaneously impressed by his reasoning. “Good point. But the same would apply to any object left on land. Where could you hide something here so that the natives wouldn’t have found it? If there were thousands of people living here, where would have been safe?”

“Well, it certainly wouldn’t be part of this monument,” Kenji noted. “This wasn’t erected until nearly a hundred years after Cook’s death.” He began searching the area around the obelisk, his mind obviously whirring with thoughts. To Charlie, he looked like the person she had met back in the Wren Library, a young man, excited by the pursuit of knowledge. “Whoever was tasked with hiding the discovery wouldn’t hide it in something from the Western world, like glass or metal, because that would stand out. They would have used the same material that the native Hawaiians had at their disposal: the lava rock.”

“That doesn’t help us at all,” Yoshi snapped. “This whole island is nothing but lava rock.”

Kenji cringed at Yoshi’s comment, even though Charlie felt his deductions were solid. She could see how desperate he was to impress his grandfather.

“There’s a good chance that, wherever this was hidden, it isn’t here anymore,” she said, hoping to derail the search. “This place has been visited far more than Rosser Reef over the years. Or maybe one of the later lava flows buried what was hidden—”

“The clue!” Kenji announced suddenly, cutting her off.

“What clue?” Charlie asked.

“The one that was left at Rosser Reef. The one which directed us here. Remember it?”

“No,” Charlie said, even though she absolutely remembered it.

“Notched, a lacerated rock incites nestling. In which I place thine implement to prove postulate,” Kenji recalled, showing that his memory was nearly as powerful as Charlie’s. “That’s not just giving us the latitude and longitude of this place: It’s telling us what to do now that we’re here.”

“So what is it telling us?” Yoshi demanded.

Kenji looked around—and suddenly froze in his tracks. Charlie immediately recognized the look of someone who had just been struck by a flash of inspiration; it was a look she knew she had displayed many times.

Kenji was staring at a large piece of lava twenty feet from the shoreline, a misshapen rock about the size of an armchair. A gnarled spike of lava jutted from the top of it like a church spire—with a perfect circle bored through the center of it. Kenji ran to it. “A lacerated rock that’s been notched! This hole was drilled too perfectly to have been done without iron tools. The British must have done it. And look!” He pointed triumphantly at the rock beneath the hole.

The initials *J. C.* had been etched into the lava.

“James Cook!” Kenji looked to Yoshi for approval, but the old man gave none.

“What good is that?” he demanded. “It’s just a hole.”

But Charlie realized what the hole was for, and she knew Kenji did too.

“It’s not a hole!” he exclaimed. “Like the clue indicates, it’s a setting. For this!” He reached into his backpack and removed the telescope that Charlie had found at the Wren

Library.

"How did you get that?" she gasped.

"I stole it from the CIA's hotel room in Cooktown while you were out on the reef. I figured it might come in handy—for something just like this." Kenji placed the telescope into the hole. It fit perfectly.

Kenji peered through the eyepiece and gave a cry of triumph.

Although Charlie feared what would happen when they found Newton's discovery, she still felt a surge of excitement. When Kenji stepped aside and offered her the chance to peer through the telescope, she rushed to see.

She found herself looking at the opening of a lava tube halfway up the slope that led away from the shore, a dark natural cave tucked among the forest. An *X* was carved into the rock just above the opening.

"*X* marks the spot!" Kenji cried, then grabbed Charlie's arm and tugged her in the direction of the cave without even waiting for his grandfather's response.

Still, it was readily apparent to Yoshi that his grandson was onto something. "Wait, you fool!" he yelled, and then came after them.

There wasn't a path to the lava tube. Instead, they had to scramble over a jumble of rocks. Somehow, Kenji managed to keep a viselike grip on Charlie's arm the entire way. She had no choice but to follow, fearing that he would otherwise simply drag her over the abrasive rock. Even so, she barked her shins repeatedly, and by the time they reached the mouth of the cave, she was bruised and bleeding.

Yoshi kept up with them, hopping agilely from one rock to another behind them. Charlie thought she could see a glint of excitement in his eyes as well, although he did his best not to show it to Kenji. "This had better be worth all the trouble," he growled.

Kenji pointed to the *X* carved over the mouth of the cave. "This *has* to be the right place!" he insisted, then yanked Charlie inside.

The entrance to the cave was only four feet high, forcing them to stoop to enter it, but inside the ceiling rose again, to about eight feet. The squeaking of bats could be heard in the shadows above. After the bright sunshine outside, it took Charlie's eyes a while to adjust to the darkness, but once they did, she could see that the cave wound back into the mountainside, a warped tunnel of black rock.

It felt to her like they were in the bowels of a giant.

Yoshi turned on the flashlight from his phone, illuminating the tunnel a bit. He shoved past Kenji and Charlie, moving deeper inside, until he spotted something on the wall that made him cry out with delight.

An arrow was etched in the rock, pointing even deeper into the cave.

Yoshi led the way it indicated. Kenji pulled Charlie along. They rounded a bend in the tunnel, cutting off the sunlight from the entrance. Darkness enveloped them. The only light now was that from the flashlight.

While it was cooler in the tunnel than it had been out in the blazing sun, the air was still warm—and yet Charlie found herself shivering.

"What's wrong?" Kenji asked her, sounding genuinely concerned.

"These caves were sacred places for the Hawaiians," Charlie said. "They entombed

their kings in them. We shouldn't be in here."

"You sound like you believe in ghosts," Yoshi scoffed.

Charlie didn't, but she still couldn't shake the odd feeling that somehow, there was another presence close by. She scanned the tunnel around her but could see nothing in the darkness.

They progressed slowly through the lava tube, as the ground was an irregular jumble of stones. Charlie pretended to stumble over one, catching Kenji by surprise and pulling free from his grasp. He took hold of her arm again quickly, but she had just enough time to snatch a rock off the ground. It was smaller than she'd hoped, only the size of a potato, but it had some sharp edges. Charlie figured it would make a halfway decent weapon when the time came for her to attempt an escape.

"Look!" Yoshi exclaimed.

In the beam of his flashlight, something gleamed ahead of them. They edged closer to find a small wooden box set in an alcove in the rock. A copper plate was affixed to the front, which was what had caught the light. The box was far enough back in the cave that Charlie could imagine no one would randomly stumble across it; only someone who had specifically come looking for it would find it.

Yoshi handed his light to Kenji, then removed the box from its resting place. He was so excited that his hands were trembling.

An inscription was etched in the copper plate: *Property of the Royal Society of London, 1776.*

"This is it!" Yoshi announced triumphantly, then opened the box.

The old metal hinges groaned as the lid lifted. Inside lay a small glass vial with a cork sealed in place with wax. A note lay beside it, the paper brown with age. Yoshi eagerly set the box down on the ground and removed the vial and the note.

Charlie was overwhelmed by conflicting emotions. She was worried for her safety but also thrilled by the discovery. She was frantically plotting how she would escape—and yet unsettled by her circumstances. She couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't quite right.

Yoshi examined the note in the feeble light. Charlie and Kenji leaned in closer to read it over his shoulder.

Congratulations, dear traveler—

In this vial, you will find the greatest discovery of my life. In solving the clues that have brought you to this place, you have proven that you have great intellect. Hopefully, you are also worthy of this elixir. I implore you to use it intelligently. Like many great scientific discoveries, it can be beneficial—or destructive. Its fate lies in your hands.

Choose wisely.

—Isaac Newton

"Finally!" Yoshi cried. "After all these years, I have found it!" He eagerly broke the seal,

holding the cork in place.

“Wait!” Kenji cautioned, worry lacing his voice. “What is this?”

“My destiny!” There was a maniacal look in Yoshi’s eyes, and Charlie realized the man was beyond reason. Now that he finally had Newton’s elixir in his hands, he was determined to use it. He lifted the vial to his lips.

“Grandfather, no!” Kenji yelled. “You don’t know what that is!”

“*I do.*” Yoshi gave Kenji a defiant look, then took a sip of the liquid.

For a moment, nothing happened. Disappointment clouded Yoshi’s face, as though he had expected the effects of the elixir to be instantaneous.

And then he gagged.

His eyes bulged. His face turned red. His hands clutched at his throat as he wheezed. The look on his face shifted from triumph to panic.

“Grandfather!” Kenji released Charlie’s arm to rush to Yoshi’s side.

But there was nothing he could do. The elixir acted quickly. The old man collapsed to the floor of the tunnel, unconscious.

Charlie raised the rock she was holding, intending to bash Kenji over the head while he was distracted.

Only, she hesitated. She couldn’t bring herself to hit someone hard enough to knock them out. But she didn’t lower the stone fast enough.

Kenji turned around and saw her there, poised to attack. Already distraught, he now grew defensive and angry. He leapt to his feet and caught her arm. “What did you do to my grandfather?” he demanded.

“Nothing!” Charlie said.

“You led us here!” Kenji shouted. “What’s going on?”

“He did that to himself!” Charlie struggled against Kenji, but he was much stronger than her.

He shoved her back into the rough stone wall of the cave, rage in his eyes. “Help him! Fix this!”

“I didn’t do that to him! I’m as confused as you are!”

“Don’t lie to me!” Kenji clamped a hand on Charlie’s neck, hard enough to make her gasp. He pushed her against the wall. The rough stones jabbed into her back.

Charlie struggled for breath, feeling her consciousness start to slip away.

Suddenly there was movement in the darkness behind Kenji. Something struck the back of his head. His grip on Charlie’s throat relaxed, and then he collapsed.

The person who had attacked him stepped forward, into the light from the beam of Yoshi’s flashlight. Although this was the first time Charlie had seen his face, she immediately knew it was the same person who had been following her progress around the world.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

“Hi, Mr. Newton,” Charlie said. “It’s nice to finally meet you.”

FORTY-FIVE

Isaac Newton appeared to have stopped aging in his thirties, several centuries earlier. He was six feet tall and in good physical shape, with long hair that cascaded down to his shoulders. His hair was gray, although it had turned that color when Newton was young. Looking at him was eerie, like staring at a textbook illustration that had come to life.

Although Charlie had read that Newton was generally dour and humorless, the man who stood before her now grinned from ear to ear, pleased by her comment. "You don't appear surprised to see me."

"No," Charlie admitted. "I figured out that *you* were the treasure that had been hidden, and not some magical potion."

"I'd love to hear how you came to that conclusion," Newton said. "Although it'd be best if we got moving. Those two won't be out for long."

Charlie looked down at Yoshi's prone body in the shadows. "That drink didn't kill him?"

Newton looked horrified at the thought. "Goodness, no. I'm not a murderer. I just provided something to knock him out." He took Charlie's arm in a fatherly way and guided her back toward the entrance of the tunnel. "I saw him capture you in Cooktown and figured you were headed this way. So I rushed back as quickly as I could to set a trap for him."

"But we left Cooktown almost immediately...."

"And I was right behind you. I had my own jet at the airport. I landed in Kona after you did, but I knew a faster way to get here. Plus, I didn't have to go through the trouble of hiring a boat."

To Charlie's surprise, Newton did not have an English accent. He had apparently lost it over the centuries. Instead, he sounded more like a Hawaiian islander.

As they emerged back into the sunlight, the brightness was blinding. It took a few moments for their eyes to adjust.

Charlie's first instinct was to look downhill toward Kealakekua Bay. The fishing boat had come to the shore again. More of Yoshi's hired goons were leaping onto land. "They must realize something's up," she observed.

"I suspected that might happen. This way." Newton turned uphill and then led Charlie across the rocky ground. "Now then, you owe me an explanation of how you came to your conclusions."

"I think you owe me a bigger explanation about what's going on here."

"All in due time. Ladies first."

Charlie decided there was no point in arguing. "*I did* think we were looking for some

sort of potion at first. But once we got to Rosser Reef and found the note saying it had been moved, I realized that wasn't the case."

"And why is that?"

"Because Rosser Reef was an incredible hiding place. If the Royal Society wanted to stash something at the farthest end of the earth, they couldn't have found much better than that. Except perhaps Alaska or Siberia, which Cook also visited. Those places are still about as remote as you can get on this planet. But Cook didn't leave the treasure in either of them. Instead, he came back to Hawaii with it. None of that made sense if Cook was hiding a vial of potion, or a recipe for the key to eternal life. But it *did* make sense if he was hiding a person. Especially a person who was going to live forever."

Newton looked back over his shoulder at Charlie, seeming thrilled with her deduction. "Bravo! You see, Charlie, this whole immortality thing was a bit of an accident. I've always had a penchant for experimenting on myself..."

"Like when you stuck the needle in your eye to figure out how we see color."

"Exactly! In part, it was the innocence of youth, but also... I couldn't get anyone else to volunteer. I didn't have many friends back then. Most of my fellow students regarded me as a bit of a crackpot. Anyhow, one day at Cambridge, I was doing some alchemical experiments when I accidentally pricked myself with a needle and injected a bit of elixir into my finger. I had burned myself earlier—and suddenly, my skin immediately repaired itself. Fascinated, I burned myself again and then gave myself a bigger dose of the elixir. My skin repaired itself once more. I thought, at the time, I had simply found a way to heal the body quickly... but after a while, I began to realize that I had discovered something much bigger than that."

Charlie heard distant shouts and looked behind her. Down the slope, Yoshi's thugs were ashore, racing as quickly as they could across the lava.

Just ahead of Charlie and Newton, the rocky terrain gave way to a gentler slope where a stunted forest grew. Newton continued his tale as he led the way along a thin trail that had been hacked through the underbrush. "Over the years, my suspicions were confirmed. My aging process had been arrested. I wasn't getting older. Which was fascinating—but also a problem. I knew some people who would be amazed by my discovery, but there were many more who might think it was the result of witchcraft—or a pact with the devil—or other dark forces. Eventually, I shared my secret with a few trusted members of the Royal Society, who agreed that we couldn't reveal the truth. So I began to remove myself from the public eye. I moved away from London. But I was perhaps a bit careless. Even though I was in my eighties, I couldn't resist returning to the Royal Society on occasion. I did my best to act my age and conceal my youth, but ultimately... Well, I always had enemies in the scientific community. Men who were jealous of my renown. I believe one of them revealed my secret to the masses, and they reacted exactly as I had feared. A mob descended on the society's headquarters, forcing me to flee. The society managed to cover up the truth about me, but to sell that, drastic steps had to be taken.

"I could never show my face in London again. My death was announced. A funeral was arranged at Westminster Abbey. I became a recluse in the British countryside from

then on—but over time, even that was not enough. It became evident that even England was too small for me to hide in, and perhaps Europe was too. So when the time came for Captain Cook's scientific mission, the small faction of the Royal Society who knew my secret came up with a plan: I would travel to the farthest ends of the earth, taking my secret with me."

"And no one on the *Endeavour* recognized you?"

"The four other members of the scientific team, led by young Joseph Banks, were all complicit in the deception—as was Cook, of course. The scientists stayed separate from the rest of the crew; we had our own quarters and dining area. And, to be truthful, the regular ship's crew were mostly young, uneducated men who had probably never even heard of me. I created a false identity for myself, a botanist named Casian Towne...."

"That's an anagram of your name."

Newton grinned at Charlie, impressed once again. "Yes. I didn't much care for being at sea, but it was a relief to be out of England and fascinating to see so many new places. And of course, charting the transit of Venus was the culmination of so much of my work. I was amazed to witness how small the planet was in relation to the sun. But then, after our near-death experience on the reef in Australia, I figured the time had come for me to disembark. We seemed to be at the end of the earth, and yet, the land was lush enough to support me, and the native people didn't seem to care much about my presence there at all."

They arrived at a barbed wire fence, indicating that they were about to enter private property. Newton held up the top strand and motioned for Charlie to pass under it.

As Charlie slipped through the fence, she asked, "Then what did the clue from Rosser Reef originally lead to?"

"It directed whoever found it slightly inland, to where I had a cabin." Newton came through the fence himself, then continued leading the way through the woods. "That was the brilliance of John Harrison's safe. There was a separate key at the Royal Society, which allowed them to easily alter the clues hidden in the safe. Which could be done after they knew the new location I had chosen to live."

"And why did you leave Australia at all?"

"Because of that ludicrous plan to turn the entire continent into the world's biggest prison. No one at the Royal Society ever suspected such a thing would happen. The Brits have come up with some bizarre ideas over the years, but shipping thousands of small-time criminals to the other side of the world? Absolute madness. Once Banks got wind of it, he feared the British would select the exact spot where I was living for a penal colony, so he began arrangements to have Cook retrieve me and take me someplace even farther."

"And that's what convinced Cook to come out of retirement?"

"Oh, that was only a piece of it. Cook loved the sea and was eager for the glory of discovering the Northwest Passage. His trip to retrieve me had to be kept a secret, though, so he doctored his journals. And I had to pretend to be a regular sailor who'd been marooned and who the crew had randomly come across and agreed to take back to England."

"You must have been awfully surprised to see Cook again."

“Certainly! But I have to admit, I was quite happy as well. I was having a difficult time in Australia. It was harder to live there than I had imagined. Whereas this place... Well, it was paradise. The people were welcoming. The land was fertile. And, as you’ve seen, the scenery is incredible. Of course, we never imagined that someday in the future, this would somehow become a part of the United States—or that there would even be a United States at all, for that matter. The thought of airplanes, or even global tourism... it’s all remarkable. But by the time all that happened, everyone at the Royal Society who knew about me was long dead, and I was thoroughly established here.”

They emerged from the forest into a large clearing that reached to the edge of the cliff, affording an incredible view of Kealakekua Bay. Uphill stood a beautiful home with walls of glass facing the water.

“Is this your land?” Charlie asked.

“Yes. The king of the Hawaiians gave it to me after I provided medical care to him and a few of his wives. He was quite happy to have me become part of his community. Although sadly, I was powerless to save them against the spread of disease that came later.” Newton hung his head. “It’s a travesty, what happened here. And so many other places around the world.”

Charlie nodded in agreement, although she was distracted by several thick columns of smoke just beyond the house. “Uh... Mr. Newton. It looks like the lava is awfully close....”

“Yes. This wouldn’t be the first time I’ve lost a home this way. I apologize for the conditions. I was hoping to be able to host you and chat a bit longer, but it appears we’ll have to evacuate.” Newton stepped up his pace, leading the way across the clearing toward his home.

“On that subject,” Charlie said. “How did you know about me?”

“I have always expected that sooner or later, someone of great intelligence would pick up the trail of clues I left and come looking for me. I’m wired into the security system at Cambridge, so I was able to watch video of you discovering the telescope in the library. Then I promptly headed to London to watch your progress. I have to admit, it’s been quite exhilarating. The most fun I’ve had in years.” Newton slapped his forehead, as though he’d forgotten something. “Which reminds me. You have a big decision to make, Miss Thorne.” He reached into his pocket, plucked out a glass vial full of dark blue fluid, and offered it to Charlie.

She accepted it reverently. “Is this...?”

“Yes. It’s what you’ve come looking for. The secret to immortality.”

FORTY-SIX

Charlie stared at the vial of fluid, so stunned that she didn't even realize she had stopped walking until Newton took her arm and urged her onward. "We really must go," he said. "I'm not sure which is more dangerous: the volcano or Yataro's men. But I'd rather not find out."

Charlie followed him but couldn't take her eyes off the vial. "You're just giving this to me?"

"Well, that *was* the point of all this. To find someone intelligent and thoughtful enough to trust with my discovery. Normally, you would have found one last clue in the cave, directing you up to my home, but I couldn't let Yataro have that. He didn't seem like he would make this decision carefully, which is of great importance. Do you wish to cheat death, Charlie?"

Charlie considered the liquid. Despite the warning she had given Yoshi before, she found herself overcome with a desire to drink it. But she held back. "I have some questions first."

Newton smiled. "I figured you would."

"Will this really give me eternal life? Like, I'll outlive the earth and the sun for billions of years?"

"A wise question. And the answer is no. Although the elixir can heal most wounds and will prevent your body from aging, you will not be immortal. You could still die in a plane crash—or a car wreck—or if the sun explodes. But if you are careful and cautious, you can live for as long as you wish."

"Can I share it with other people?"

"I would not recommend that. Not everyone is prepared to make the sacrifices that come with it."

"Like the ones you've made?"

"Exactly. To avoid the secret getting out, you have to seclude yourself."

"And I suppose letting the whole world have it is out of the question. Because of the whole overpopulation problem."

"Correct again. Humanity isn't ready for this on a mass scale... yet."

"But it might be some day?"

"Perhaps. That is a decision I will leave to you."

Charlie turned to Newton, surprised. "Me? What about you?"

"I've lived a longer life than anyone before me. I have seen the world change in ways I could never imagine. But I am growing weary. And now that you are here, I feel I finally have someone I can pass this knowledge on to."

They had reached the house. Through the windows, Charlie could see the entirety of it. It was relatively modest in design, with a kitchen, living room, and bedroom—although there was also a laboratory. And behind it was a small observatory dome.

Newton steered her around the house, toward a freestanding garage. “Unfortunately, I don’t have time to show you around.”

Charlie nodded understanding, then considered the elixir again. It was almost as if it was calling to her. “What was it like, outliving all your friends and loved ones?”

Newton glanced back at her. “That is your wisest question yet. I will admit, I have never been one for romantic relationships—or even strong friendships.”

“Never in your entire life?”

“No. A quirk of my personality, I suppose. In my youth, I was rather difficult to get along with, but I suppose I have mellowed with age. Even so, I have been fine without the company of others. I have had my books and my experiments. Once air travel came along, and enough time had passed that it was impossible for people to conceive that I might still be alive, I was able to explore the world. But other people might not be so content in solitude. Even for me, that has been the greatest burden of immortality....”

There was a loud whoosh of air from close by. They came around the house to see that a stream of lava was flowing across the property. It had already cut across the dirt driveway and was oozing past the base of a good-size eucalyptus tree, which had just caught fire. As they watched, the entire canopy went up in flames.

“Goodness!” Newton exclaimed. “It’s closer than I expected!” He hurried Charlie to the garage and flung open the door.

Inside, there was a regular car—and a mud-splattered all-terrain vehicle. Newton handed Charlie a helmet, then pointed to the ATV. “Hop on!”

Charlie tucked the vial of elixir into her pocket, then did what Newton had asked.

The lava was twenty meters away, but she could still feel its heat from that distance. It formed a glowing orange tendril that slowly crept toward the house.

Newton regarded his home with sadness. “This was a good place,” he said, then climbed aboard the ATV in front of Charlie and started it up.

The engine came to life with a loud roar. Newton backed the ATV out of the garage, then shifted into gear and raced past the approaching lava.

When Charlie had begun that day, she’d had a vague hope of meeting Isaac Newton—but she had never imagined that she would end up clutching desperately to him as he raced away from molten lava on an ATV. Even among the large number of bizarre adventures she’d had over the last year, this stood out.

As they sped past the driveway, she had a view up it, toward the volcano itself. While she had been distracted with the search for Newton, things had gotten much worse. The stream of lava near the house was only a small branch of a great river of fire that was descending toward them. In its wake, much of the nearby town was burning.

Since the driveway was blocked, Newton took an alternative route, a faint four-wheel-drive path hacked through the stunted forest around his property.

The ATV’s motor was so loud, Charlie had to shout to be heard. “Where are we heading?”

“Toward Kona! Hopefully, the lava hasn’t cut off this path yet!”

The escape route was barely wide enough for the ATV, a dusty, rutted track so full of rocks that Charlie was jounced about as though she was on a trampoline. While the driveway would have taken them uphill to the belt road, the ATV path dipped closer to Kealakekua Bay....

And Yataro’s men. Block, Dryden, and the others who had joined them in Kona were on the trail that led from the lave tube to Newton’s home. They opened fire on Newton and Charlie through the woods. Newton yelped in surprise and gunned the engine. They raced through the forest, getting bounced even harder on the rutted road while bullets whizzed past them, but managed to leave the henchmen behind.

The henchmen still took up the chase, fighting their way through the forest.

Newton emerged from the trees onto a barren stretch of lava—and suddenly slammed on the brakes.

To her dismay, Charlie saw that, just ahead of them, a thick stream of lava was about to cut off their escape. It would be only a few minutes, if that, before it arrived.

But Yoshi Yataro stood directly in their path, pointing a gun at them.

FORTY-SEVEN

Since Newton was wearing a helmet, it appeared Yoshi had no idea who he was. Instead, he was completely focused on Charlie. "Give me Newton's discovery!" he demanded. "The real thing this time! No tricks!"

Now that he'd regained consciousness, he was wild-eyed with rage. Kenji was nowhere to be seen. Charlie figured he must have still been out cold in the cave.

"Wait here," Newton told her. "I'll take care of this." He got off the ATV, put his hands in the air, and cautiously approached Yoshi.

Charlie slid forward so she was sitting behind the handlebars and turned off the ATV. In the ensuing silence, she could hear the distant whirr of the helicopters, and the shouts of Yoshi's men as they thrashed through the forest. Except for a faint sizzle of heat, the approaching lava was eerily quiet.

Charlie shifted uneasily on the ATV. Between the henchmen, the lava, and Yoshi, she was trapped.

Meanwhile, Newton appeared completely calm. "Let the girl go," he said to Yoshi. "She doesn't have what you want."

Yoshi aimed the gun at him. "You're the one who drugged me. You're in league with her!"

"I did that to you on my own accord. She's innocent. Let her go."

"Who are you?"

Newton removed his helmet, revealing his face. "I'm the man you've come looking for."

Charlie watched Yoshi's reaction closely. The old man shifted from anger to astonishment as he realized who Newton was. "You? You're..."

"Yes," Newton said.

"So... it works? You truly know the secret to eternal life?"

"Yes."

Yoshi's awe faded and was replaced by a steely determination. He kept his gun aimed at Newton and said, "Give it to me."

Newton pointed to the gun. "You must realize that will have no effect on me." Charlie knew he was bluffing, but he spoke with surprising conviction. "So why don't you put it away, and then we can talk?"

Yoshi grinned cruelly. "I know I can't kill you. But I can kill *her*." He shifted the gun toward Charlie. "Now, I won't ask you again. Give me your discovery."

Charlie's heart leapt. There was nowhere on the open, barren plain for her to hide.

Behind her, the henchmen were almost out of the woods. Ahead, the lava was about to

cut off her only chance of escape.

Newton looked back at her and winked.

Charlie realized what he was about to do.

“No!” she shouted.

But it was too late. Newton had already launched himself at Yoshi.

He caught the old man by surprise, grabbing his gun hand, but Yoshi fought back with strength and skill. They wrestled for the weapon, although Yoshi seemed to have the upper hand.

Charlie leapt from the ATV and ran to help.

“Go!” Newton shouted at her, and then, as if to ensure that Charlie didn’t get involved, he made one final lunge.

He drove Yoshi backward to a small ledge by a channel through which the lava was flowing. They tottered on the edge, then toppled into the channel.

Charlie froze in horror.

The two men dropped from her sight into the flow of lava. Yoshi screamed, while Newton somehow remained silent. A burst of flame flared up as the molten rock consumed them.

Even though Charlie couldn’t see them, she reflexively averted her eyes.

Yoshi’s men were still coming, unaware of what had happened to him.

There was nothing else Charlie could do there. Newton was gone. She climbed back onto the ATV and raced it along the barren landscape.

The lava was only inches from the ATV path. As she sped by, the heat was strong enough to singe her skin.

But then she was beyond it. The molten rock flowed across the path behind her, preventing the henchmen from following. She glanced back and saw them glaring after her in frustration.

And in the distance behind them, Kenji stood watching her, silhouetted against the Pacific Ocean. She was too far to see his face, but she could tell he was waving to her, almost as if he was a friend, wishing her well on her travels.

She wondered if he was aware of what had happened to his grandfather, and if he would be upset or relieved when he learned.

She turned her attention to the path ahead of her, racing along it as fast as she could go. Tears welled in her eyes, though whether they were due to the wind in her face, or the thought of what Newton had done to protect her, she wasn’t sure.

After a few minutes, the ATV path she was on came to the belt road, close to where the police barricade was arranged. A young police officer flagged her down and hurried to her side, carrying a bottle of water.

“Where are you coming from?” he asked.

“Kealakekua,” Charlie replied. “There’s a few other people down there who might need rescuing.” She took off her helmet to accept the water.

The policeman gaped at her in surprise. Charlie figured it was because she was a mess. She was covered with scrapes and bruises from the old lava, slightly burnt by the new lava, and shell-shocked by everything that had happened.

But then the policeman lifted a whistle to his lips and blew it, and Charlie realized that she had read him wrong. He had been surprised because he recognized her.

The other police working the roadblock came running, guns pointed her way. There was no way for Charlie to get past them all. So she raised her hands in surrender and said, "Whoa! I'm just a kid trying to escape the volcano!"

Only, even as she said it, she knew they wouldn't believe it. She caught a glimpse of a flyer clutched in another police officer's hand. It showed a photo of her, along with the heading *Wanted by the CIA*.

The police surrounded her. And then another man came through the crowd. Charlie had never met him before in person, but she knew exactly who she was. He wore a three-piece suit and a cocky smile, seeming extremely pleased with himself.

"Charlie Thorne," said Arthur Zell. "You're under arrest for treason."

FORTY-EIGHT

The CIA brought Charlie back to the Kona airport in a rented sedan. Zell had come to Hawaii with only one other agent, who was one of the biggest people Charlie had ever met. Agent Colton was nearly seven feet tall, and his body bulged with muscles, although he didn't say much. Charlie got the idea he had been hired for his brawn, rather than his brains.

Charlie sat in the back seat next to him, her wrists cinched with zip ties yet again. Zell drove, Newton's vial tucked into the breast pocket of his suit. Colton had found it while frisking Charlie after her apprehension. Zell was in high spirits, humming to himself happily.

During the drive, the sun had set over the Pacific, and the skies were darkening quickly. The height of Mauna Kea and its distance from the mainland made it an excellent location for telescopes, so the Big Island had made great efforts to cut down on light pollution to enable better star viewing. Much of the island was as dark as any inhabited place on earth could be. Even the airport operated with limited light. The jets in the private parking area were just silhouettes in the night as they approached.

Charlie sized up Colton and asked, "You're not taking me back to Langley, are you?"

"Figured that out, did you?" Zell asked cheerfully. "You *are* smart, I'll give you that. We need that equation you've memorized. So we'll be taking you to a facility staffed by specialists at extracting information. Colton here is one of them. I might have him get a head start on the process on the plane. Although you could save yourself a whole lot of trouble and cough it up right now."

"Your intel is wrong," Charlie insisted. "I never found the equation in the first place. Einstein must have changed his mind and removed it."

Zell met Charlie's eyes in the rear-view mirror. "Why don't you just make things easy on yourself and tell me the truth?"

"Why don't you tell *me* the truth?" Charlie replied. "If I *did* know this equation, would you set me free after I gave it to you?"

Zell broke his gaze with her, indicating that the question had made him uneasy.

"That's what I thought," Charlie said.

They pulled through the security gate and parked on the tarmac, close to a jet that was ready to fly. Colton roughly hauled Charlie out of the car, like she was a piece of luggage, then walked her toward the jet.

The tarmac was still radiating heat after baking in the sun all day. The sky above was already filled with stars. In the distance, the lava flow was a bright orange slash.

Three people were standing beside the jet. Charlie figured she knew who they were,

but it was so dark, she couldn't tell for sure until they got closer.

Khatti and Wexler were there with Dante between them.

"Charlie!" Dante exclaimed upon seeing her. He no longer seemed angry with her. Instead, he looked relieved to see she was all right—and also worried by their predicament.

"Hey, Dante." Charlie was also relieved and worried at once.

"You're under arrest for treason," Khatti said.

"I've already told her that," Zell snapped. "You failed at your mission, so I came here to handle things myself. Garcia will be coming with me, while you return to Langley." He strode past Khatti toward the waiting jet.

"I wasn't talking to Charlie," Khatti said. "I was talking to *you*."

Zell froze in surprise and wheeled on Khatti. "What did you say?"

Khatti took out her own gun and aimed it at Zell. "You're under arrest. You changed the orders for Ford and Theodorakis. You were having Garcia and Moon delivered to Black Sands to cover up the truth. They were never traitors. *You* ordered them to be killed."

"That's not true," Zell said weakly.

"I've seen the orders," Khatti said. "Which made me wonder what else you had lied about. So I checked out the emails that Charlie hacked from the server."

"How could you possibly have seen those?" Zell asked.

Colton suddenly leapt into action, snatching a gun from his holster and pointing it toward Khatti, but before he could pull the trigger, someone sprang from the shadows behind him. Despite Colton's size, he wasn't an adept fighter. Instead, he was used to simply overpowering his opponents. This time, his attacker was faster and more skilled than he expected. Within seconds, the giant was unconscious on the tarmac.

Milana Moon stood over him victoriously. "I brought the documents to Agent Khatti," she told Zell. "Dante called me from Australia, and I jumped onto the first plane here to meet them."

"I don't like being used as a pawn," Khatti said angrily.

Zell's confidence vanished. He now looked terrified. "What will it take to set things right?" he asked Khatti. "Do you want money? A promotion?"

"Get him on the plane," Khatti told Wexler.

Zell began to protest, but Wexler dutifully zip-tied his wrists.

Charlie hurried to his side. "Hold on," she said. "He took something of mine." She fished Newton's vial out of Zell's pocket, then grinned at the disgraced CIA director. "Have fun in jail."

"That won't happen," Zell said. "I've got friends in high places. They'll protect me!" He continued shouting as Wexler dragged him away. By the time they disappeared onto the jet, he was almost in tears.

Khatti shifted her attention to the vial in Charlie's hand. "What is that?"

"Newton's discovery," Charlie replied.

"I thought you said it was going to be another equation like Pandora."

"Well, I was wrong. This is still pretty amazing, though. It makes you almost

immortal.”

Khatti, Dante, and Milana stared at her in disbelief.

“No,” Khatti said. “That can’t be.”

“It can. Newton himself gave it to me.”

“You met Isaac Newton?” Dante gasped. “Here?”

“Yeah. Although he sacrificed himself to protect that from Yoshi Yataro. So we really owe it to him to take good care of this.”

Khatti sighed. “You’re going to have to give me a full debriefing on the jet.”

“No,” said Charlie.

Khatti gaped at her. “No?”

“But here’s what I *will* do,” Charlie said. “I’ll give you this vial under two conditions. First, you make sure that it’s used wisely. Give it to the National Institutes of Health, have them figure out how to use it to cure diseases. Don’t auction it off to billionaires so that they can live forever.”

Khatti nodded. “That seems reasonable.”

“Second, you wipe Dante and Milana’s records of all charges. Let them go back to being normal citizens. Seeing as you now know they didn’t do anything wrong anyhow.”

“And I guess you’d like your record wiped clean too?”

“I never did anything wrong either,” Charlie said.

Khatti considered her options, then said, “I’m going to need some proof that vial’s not just full of Kool-Aid.”

Charlie uncapped the vial and rubbed a small bit of the elixir on one of her scraped-up legs. The others watched with amazement as the skin quickly healed itself.

Since Khatti hadn’t been party to the other amazing things Charlie, Milana, and Dante had witnessed, she was particularly moved. “Okay,” she said. “You’ve got a deal.”

Charlie handed her the vial. As Khatti took it, she held Charlie’s gaze. “You really didn’t find Pandora?”

“No,” Charlie replied, selling the lie well.

Khatti stared at her for another few seconds, as though trying to tell whether or not this was the truth. Finally, she said. “It’s probably safer with you than it would be anywhere else.” Then she turned and headed for the plane.

“What made you change your mind?” Charlie called after her.

Khatti paused and looked back. “About what?”

“Looking at the evidence. You said you had your orders.”

“And you compared me to the Nazis. When a thirteen-year-old says that to you, it makes you think about your priorities.” With that, Khatti turned and boarded the jet.

Dante and Milana rushed to Charlie’s side and hugged her tightly.

“Thank goodness you’re all right,” Milana told her.

“I was going to say the same thing to you,” Charlie told her. “How’d you get away from the CIA?”

“Long story,” said Milana. “How’d you get that elixir?”

“Another long story.”

They started to walk away from the jet, across the tarmac toward the gate for the

airport.

Behind them, Wexler emerged from the jet to haul Colton aboard.

"Sorry I screwed up in London and got you arrested," Charlie said.

"That wasn't entirely on you," Milana told her, then looked to Dante pointedly. "Was it?"

"No," Dante admitted. "We shouldn't expect you to behave like a CIA agent without having been trained like one."

"So are we good?" Charlie asked.

Dante grinned. "Yeah, we're good. Although, I have to know: What'd you really do with Newton's discovery?"

Charlie gave him a confused look. "I just gave it to Khatti."

"Yeah, I know that's what you wanted us to all think. But what did you *really* do with it? Did you swap out the vial with a decoy at the last second?"

"No."

"Did you only give her half of it and save the rest for yourself? Or water it down to make extra?"

"No. I gave her everything."

Dante recoiled in surprise. "You had the secret to immortality, and you just gave it away?"

"In the right hands, it could be really beneficial to lots of people."

"You didn't want to keep *any* of it for yourself?"

"Of course not. I don't want to live forever. Someday, I hope I'll meet someone and have a family with them. I don't want to outlive them and all my kids and my grandkids, too. That sounds a whole lot worse than dying."

Dante considered that, then nodded. "I guess it would be."

"Smart kid," Milana agreed.

There was a roar behind them. The CIA jet sped down the runway and lifted into the air, quickly disappearing into the night sky.

Charlie, Dante, and Milana passed through the airport gate on foot. Before them was an open road, heading across the lava. They kept walking.

"I wouldn't want to outlive both of you by centuries either," Charlie said. "I'd miss you too much."

Dante and Milana turned to her, surprised yet again.

"After everything went wrong in London," Charlie said, "I didn't really care about what Newton's discovery could do for me. I only wanted to find it to fix things between all of us. To trade it to the CIA for your freedom. I know I've given you a lot of grief for how you turned my life upside down when you recruited me to all of this, but you also gave me something important. Something I didn't realize was important until I'd lost it."

"What's that?" Dante asked.

"*You*," Charlie said. "Both of you. You're my family now—and that's the greatest treasure there is."

Dante and Milana stared at her for a moment longer. Then both burst into laughter.

"That has to be the cheesiest thing you've ever said in your life," Dante said.

“Possibly,” Charlie said. “But it’s true.”

“You’re right,” Dante said. “As usual.”

He took her hand in his. Milana took her other hand. And the three of them continued on, wondering where their next adventure might take them.

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is extremely rare to be able to pinpoint the exact date that the inspiration for a book first came to me, but I can do it with this one: December 31, 1999.

That was a relatively fraught day in world history. Many of you readers are too young to remember the Y2K panic, but the basics were that, due to the switch from the year 1999 to 2000, there was a great deal of concern that all the computer networks in the world might get confused, leading to all sorts of crises. For example, people were worried that air traffic systems would crash, dragging all air travel to a halt.

So my friends and I had gone to Hawaii. Our thought was that, should we get stuck someplace for a few weeks due to grounded air traffic, Hawaii wouldn't be that bad. (Although I don't think we had put any thought into what would happen if the supply of food was cut off to Hawaii for a few weeks.) We were staying on the Big Island, and on December 31, I went off by myself to rent a kayak and explore a place I had heard about called Kealahou Bay.

The reason I went was because I had been told that dolphins routinely came alongside kayakers there (which didn't happen for me that day) and that the snorkeling was excellent (which turned out to be true). I didn't know that Captain James Cook had died there until I came across the monument. In fact, I probably didn't know much about James Cook, period, until that day. But I grew intrigued as to how such a great explorer had met his end there. It turned out to be a fascinating story, which drove me to learn more about Cook. I read Tony Horwitz's fantastic book *Blue Latitudes*, which is partially about Cook and partially about Horwitz following Cook's path in the modern day and seeing what had happened to the places Cook visited. That book really stuck with me.

Often, I find my readers are startled to hear that I've been playing around with ideas for much longer than they've been alive. But that's how inspiration works sometimes. You find something that fascinates you and you store it away in the back of your mind, thinking you might find a way to use it someday.

Some years later, I was at an exhibit about Albert Einstein at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City when the idea for *Charlie Thorne and the Last Equation* came to me. The idea obviously was focused on a discovery of Einstein's, but as I worked on that book, I began to think of other great scientists whose discoveries Charlie could go looking for. Isaac Newton was one of them, because, well... you can't really make a list of great scientists and not include Newton. But for a long time, it didn't seem like Newton would be a good subject, because—as noted in this book—while Newton did a lot of amazing things, he didn't travel very far in his lifetime.

Meanwhile, James Cook had traveled *very* far. It's quite possible that he traveled farther—and saw more of the world—than any other human ever had up until that point.

In fact, Cook traveled farther than most modern humans do. And then, one day, it occurred to me that Newton and Cook were actually connected via the British Royal Society. Cook's travels to observe the transit of Venus were directly related to Newton's work. So maybe the Royal Society could pass Newton's discovery on to Cook and give him the task of hiding it.

So I set to work doing research on both men. I reread *Blue Latitudes* as well as two of the other most significant science books I have ever encountered. Timothy Ferris's *Coming of Age in the Milky Way*, in addition to brilliantly explaining the Newton-Cook connection (as well as a lot of other fascinating misadventures that other scientists had en route to observe the transit of Venus), had also been very inspirational to me with my research into Charles Darwin. And Dava Sobel's *Longitude* introduced me (and just about everyone else, it sometimes seems) to the extraordinary story of John Harrison. Meanwhile, I received additional research help from my interns Lillian Liu and Paola Camacho as well as a very determined young reader named Prithvi Narayanan. And my assistant, Emma Chanen, was invaluable in not just research but every other aspect of creating this book. And Emma Gustafson was a huge help with final edits.

Some travel was involved in that research as well. My favorite research assistants, my children—Dashiell and Violet—accompanied me for all of it, and were game for all sorts of adventures, from snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef to learning how to hunt mud crabs from a native Australian to climbing the Sydney Harbor Bridge. (When your kids turn to you while standing on the crossbeam atop a bridge and say, "This is a great place for an action sequence," you had better listen to them.)

Our dear family friends the Howells (Mike, Courtney, Zach, Maya, and Esme) accompanied my children and me on an extremely informative research trip to Cambridge, England. Bizarrely, Mike is also the person who the British government once tasked with determining whether or not the monument to Cook at Kealakekua Bay actually stands on land ceded by Hawaii to the British government or not. (Answer: It doesn't.)

I have also made several return visits to Kealakekua Bay over the years (because it really does have excellent snorkeling). So I owe thanks to my travel companions on those excursions: Barry and Carole Patmore and my parents, Ronald and Jane Gibbs. My father, it should be noted, is a passionate fan of world exploration, as well as the current president of the California Map Society. He and my mother both collect antique, historic maps, and the walls of my home were always covered with them, which might explain my fascination with people like Cook.

Thanks are also due to my travel companions on that first inspirational trip to Hawaii: Jill Blotevogel and Phyllis and Ted Strong. On the very day after I visited Kealakekua Bay, January 1, 2000, all of us did something that inspired another scene in this book: we hiked through Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park at night to witness an honest-to-goodness lava flow. (For the record, this was completely sanctioned by the park service, who even sold us flashlights to do it.) The lava flow wasn't quite as destructive as the one I describe, but still, it was an awesome spectacle.

For the record, this is a work of fiction. Newton did not discover the secret to eternal

life, and Cook was not given orders to take it to the farthest ends of the earth. But most of the other details about their lives—or the places they visited—that I use in this book are true. (And while I'm at it, the idea that we might be able to stop human aging isn't as far-fetched as you might think. There are a good number of respected scientists who believe that it's possible.)

On the work front, as usual, there are many people at Simon & Schuster to thank for their tireless work on my books: Krista Vitola, Justin Chanda, Lucy Ruth Cummins, Erin Toller, Beth Parker, Roberta Stout, Kendra Levin, Alyza Liu, Anne Zafian, Lisa Moraleda, Jenica Nasworthy, Chava Wolin, Chrissy Noh, Ashley Mitchell, Brendon MacDonald, Nadia Almahdi, Christina Pecorale, Victor Iannone, Emily Hutton, Emily Ritter, Theresa Pang, Michelle Leo, Nicole Benevento, and Amy Beaudoin. And I would not have any sort of writing career at all without my incredible agent, Jennifer Joel.

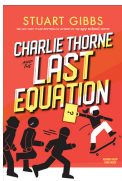
I need to give special attention to one more person who accompanied me to Kealakekua Bay several times, as well as to hundreds of other amazing places: my wife, Suzanne Patmore Gibbs, who died far too young. She was a proponent of this series from the very beginning. And she supported me many years ago when I had the wild idea to shift from screenwriting to writing books. Suzanne used to say that one day, she was going to put together a slideshow of all the things I had talked her into doing. (Among others, I got her to return to Hawai'i Volcanoes with me to hike to yet another lava flow.) But she was always game for adventure, and I know that she enjoyed almost everything we did. (Although perhaps not quite all of it.) She was a wonderful life partner and I miss her every day.

Finally, thanks once more to Dashiell and Violet, for coming along on all the wild adventures as well. (In fact, sometimes, they even talk *me* into doing things.) You are the best children any parent could ever ask for. I love you both to the moon and back.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

STUART GIBBS is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Charlie Thorne, FunJungle, Moon Base Alpha, Once Upon a Tim, and Spy School series. He has written screenplays, worked on a whole bunch of animated films, developed TV shows, been a newspaper columnist, and researched capybaras (the world's largest rodents). Stuart lives with his family in Los Angeles. You can learn more about what he's up to at stuartgibbs.com.

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